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CHRIST,
THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD:

Biblical Studies

ON THE

FIRST TEN CHAPTERS OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN,

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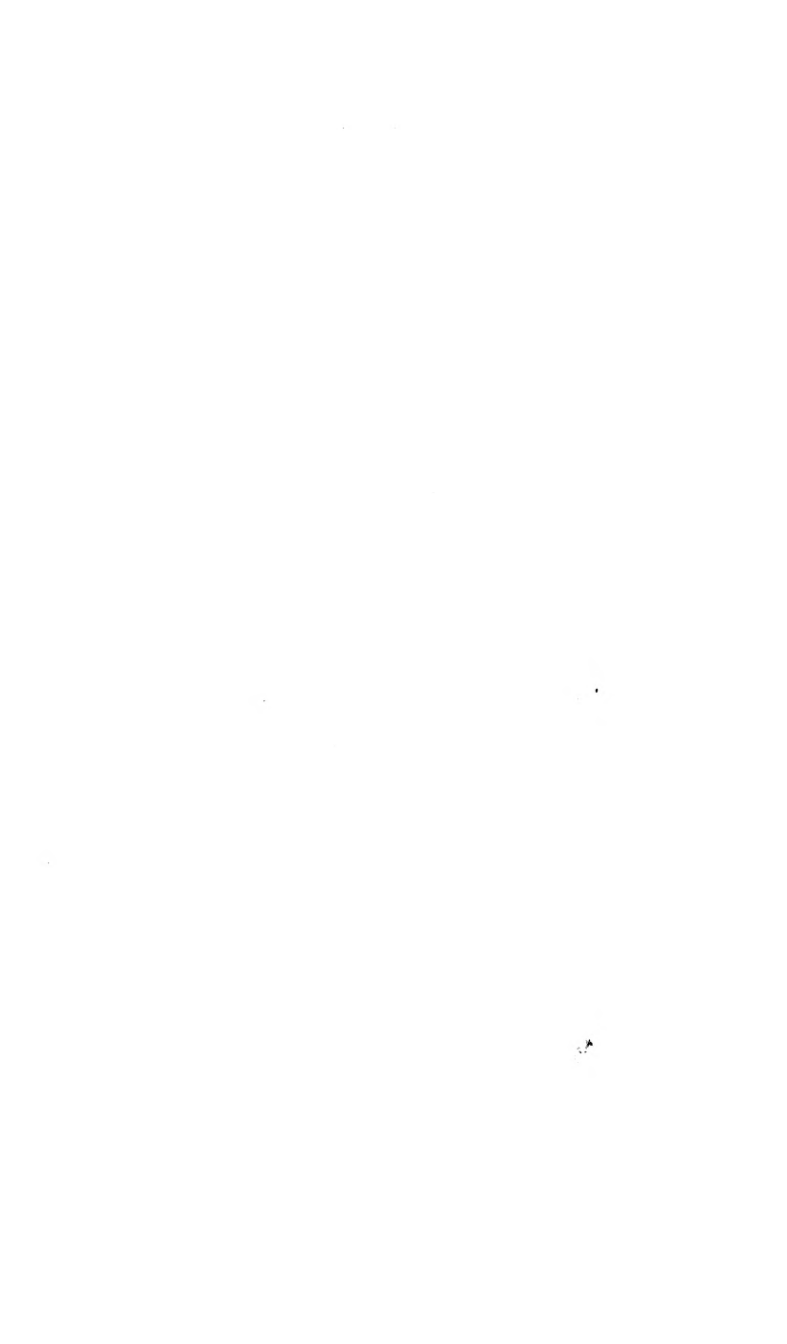
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CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

The Word became Flesh.

ST. JOHN I. 1-18.

O Lord Jesus, Thou who art the true Light, do Thou enlighten us that we may see Thy glory. Amen.

WHEN the holy John committed his Gospel to writing, to bequeath it as a precious legacy to the Church, the three other Gospels were already in the hands and hearts of Christians, and had been so for a considerable time. On this account he did not write with the intention of setting down in order *everything* relating to Christ which he had preserved in the inestimable treasures of his recollection of Him; but as he himself says: "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are *not* written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." Therefore it was not so much a Gospel history, as histories full of Gospel, that he intended to write. JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD: LIFE THROUGH FAITH IN THE NAME OF THIS JESUS;—in these two positions, the substance of St. John's Gospel is briefly summed up. Into the mystery of the Word which was made Flesh, and into the mystery of that faith through which *all* flesh is made participant in life, St. John is all through looking with fixed and stedfast gaze; while also, it is his joy to

point out the "treasure" of life, which lies hidden in the "field" of the Gospel history, to the notice and contemplation of others.

The old Fathers have been wont to compare St. John to an eagle, and the comparison is just; in profound meditation upon the truths of our redemption, he mounts up on the wings of devotion, even to the very loftiest heights of these blessed mysteries. In fact, with that loving gaze fixed upwards upon the Light of Life, his own eye has become light—the sun has made it sun-like. The beauteous lightness of peace is diffused upon him. If, on the one hand, "the sun never mirrors his glorious face in the sea, amid the storm;" on the other hand, it is likewise true, that in the blessed repose of such a soul as St. John's, the face of Heaven's sun is mirrored back in clear and faithful reflexion.

"St. John's Gospel is a deep and tranquil lake," says an old Divine, "in which are reflected the pleasant shores around, and the pure, clear sky, with sun, moon, and stars above."

At a very early period he was surnamed *The Divine*—the sage learned in God Himself. It is not human wisdom however which has given to him a learned tongue, but an "*unction* from the Holy One," (1 St. John ii. 20); unction, welling up out of the personal union of an adoring, self-devoted soul with her eternal Bridegroom.

Luther, referring to such divinity, says: "John speaks in crude and simple language, such as a child might use, and his words sound altogether childish (so the wise of this world consider them); but underneath there is hidden a majesty which no man, however highly enlightened, can either explore or surpass." And Löke describes St. John's manner thus: "What in truth is it that makes the writings of the holy Apostle John so marvellously attractive to us, so that when we hear them or read them, they take so strong a hold upon our minds? Granted, that there is in them a tone of simplicity and love, which belongs rather to Heaven than to this world; but whence comes this simplicity, this love? It is not the simplicity of a child, neither

is it love such as the world has and bestows, but it is the simplicity of a seraph, and it is love, such as blossoms around the eternal Throne of the blessed Son of God. The simplicity of *fruition* it is which reappears in the simplicity of expression, and love to that only One upon whose breast the loving disciple leant at supper it is, which has begotten the language of love. It is simple love to that only Jesus who is very man, and at the same time very God and eternal Life, that speaks from the mouth of St. John, and that would fain constrain the spirits of men, yea, of all who come into the world, to come to St. John's beloved Master, and to the bosom on which he lay." On the breast of Jesus it was that the fire which burnt so vehemently in the virgin spirit of St. John—the Jeremiah of the New Testament—became purified into that peaceful glow of holy love, of which we sing :

Upon Thine altar, light Thy fire ;
 Let me be offered all entire !
 Consume of me each selfish part,
 O Thou, all perfect Love that art !

And the words of his mouth are the resounding thunder (Mark iii. 17) which appertains to the flashing lightning of his life's love.

To the mind of the disciple, filled with the majesty of the only-begotten Son, everything that Jesus *does*, is a *sign*, which is interpreted by the *words* of the Lord. As he said to St. Peter by the lake of Gennesareth, when the risen Jesus stood on the shore, so he again and again exultingly repeats to the reader of his Gospel : "It is the Lord !"

May the Grace of the Lord shed into our hearts that spirit of love in which St. John, the disciple whom the Lord loved, received his Gospel ; that so in the study of it, Claudius' experience may be ours, when he says : "In the perusal of St. John's writings, I always feel as if I saw him before me at the last supper, lying on his Master's breast ;—as if his angel were holding the light to me, and at certain passages, were ready to fall

on my neck and whisper something into my ears. I am far from understanding all that I read, but often it seems as if St. John's meaning were floating at a distance before my eyes ; still even then, when I am gazing into a passage altogether dark to me, I have yet a strong presentiment of some great and glorious thought which I shall one day be able to understand."

Ver. 1. "*In the beginning was the Word.*"

St. Mark also commences his Gospel with the word, *beginning* : "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark i. 1). But St. John speaks of another *beginning* from that which was made by the voice of the preacher in the wilderness. He goes back, even further than St. Matthew, who begins with Abraham, whose promised seed is Jesus Christ, the Son of David ; and further than St. Luke, who carries the sacred pedigree of the Son of Man's salvation back even to Adam, the beginner of the race of sinners. As Moses commences the history of the Creation with the words : *In the beginning*, so St. John commences his Gospel with the same words, though he soars higher even than Moses.

In the beginning, before God had yet created the heavens and the earth, the Word already *was*. He did not *come into being*, but He *was* ; there was no time in which He was not, for He is the *eternal Word*.

Before this Word, who is announced in the Gospel, appeared in time, *He was in the beginning* (see 1 John i. 1-3) ; before He became the Light and Life of men, *He was with God* ; before He became Flesh, *He was God*.

St. John gives to the eternal Son of the eternal Father, the "only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father," the appellation of *The Word* ; and he does so because through Him all things were made (ver. 3) ; He is the creative Word of God (comp. Gen. i. 3 with Heb. xi. 3 ; Ps. xxxiii. 6-9), and because in Him is Life (ver. 4), He is *the Word of Life* (1 St. John i. 1, 2).

He not only *has* and *conveys* the Word of God, but He *is* Himself that Word which God sends (Ps. cvii. 20 ; cxlvii. 15 ;

Acts x. 36); His name is: *the Word of God* (Rev. xix. 13); He who says by the mouth of the Prophet: "I am He that doth speak, behold, it is I," (Isa. lii. 6); the living God, as revealing Himself—such is *the Word*. (See chap. viii. 25; and Heb. i. 1, 2).

The knowledge of the fact, that the *one* God is no *solitary* God, but that in the perfect Divine Being, who is everlasting Love, there are contained an I, and a Thou, and a We, who dwell in loving communion, shines forth here and there even in the Old Testament, although there "the one-half hidden in the mine still lies." Throughout the whole of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi, *the Angel of the Lord* is seen acting; that Angel, who is distinguished from all created angels, by this, that God's Name—that is, the entire fulness of the Divine attributes—is in Him (Ex. xxiii. 21), and therefore that in Him is mirrored the Being of God, as in the Angel of His presence (Isa. lxiii. 9). In Him God complacently contemplates His own Being, and through Him reveals Himself to whom He will. In the *Word*, who was in the beginning, God from all eternity, was, before Himself uttering forth His own Being, laying up therein the fulness of His goodness (Heb. i. 3); for "He is a Word which God has with His own self, in His own Divine Being, and which is His own heart's thought. He says, therefore, of Himself, that the Godhead is wholly contained in Him, and whoever has the Word, the same has the whole Godhead. As it were, the whole heart of God is there, just as in man's word we recognise man's heart. But the image does not come quite up to the reality; for man's word carries along with it the nature (the contents) of his heart by signification merely; whereas here, that which is signified is in the Word, in nature and essence." (Luther). Or again, as *Brenz* discourses concerning Him: "Just as the brook is never separated from its spring, nor the sunbeam from the sun, so likewise is the Son never separated from the Father."

Even Jewish and heathen wisdom had some dim perception of that archetype, which subsisted in the Being of God, of the

creaturely word of man, through which man's thought reveals itself ; and the apostolic announcement did not disdain the vessel which had been the *vehicle* of that wisdom, but first cleaning it out, that nothing impure might remain behind, "then filled it with contents furnished by that history, which, in the New Testament, exhibits to us the reality of what before had been so dimly descried." (Delitzsch).

"*And the Word was with God.*"

The Word was *with* God, not merely *in* Him : He was God's "Companion," "the Man who is God's *Fellow*." He is not an Attribute resting in God, or a Power emanating from Him, but a *Person*, a real independent "I," resounding with the "Thou," uttered by the voice of Divine Love, and filled with the contents of the Divine Life. (Ch. xvii. 5-24, v. 26).

In the Greek word for our *with* (more properly, *towards* God), there is also expressed the mutual love in which the word is eternally turned *towards* God. What St. John means to set forth is not so much *where* as *how*, in what condition the Word was, namely, in eternal communion of Love with God. There are the two : God and the Word. But the Word, though personally distinct from God, and *another Being*, is yet not *another thing* than God ; and therefore, that no man might separate in essence the Word from God, the Son from the Father, "he comes round back again, and knits up the ring and says :"

"*And the Word was God.*"

Dost thou ask : *When* was the Word ? St. John answers : He was *in the beginning*. Dost thou ask : *In what condition* was the Word ? He replies : He was *with God*. Dost thou enquire, *What* was the Word ? His answer is : He was *God*, God's equal in power and honour. The apostle therefore calls the Father, whose Word the Son is, simply *God* (the Word was *with God*) ; at the same time he also says of the *Word*, that His essence is *God*. So then there are not two Gods, but one God ; while, however, St. John teaches us to distinguish between the

Divine Person with whom the Word is, and the Divine Person who is Himself the Word.

Now the apostle closes up the first and third propositions of this verse with the second, and continues :—Ver. 2. “*The same* (this Word, which was God) *was in the beginning with God.*”

In the beginning, with God, was the Word, who Himself was God. He was not at some time in the beginning contained in God, in order then first to become a self-subsistent Person, when the world should be made by Him, and when He should become Flesh, that He might dwell *among us* (ver. 14); but as God of God, He was *in the beginning* with God. Before He dwelt among us He had been from all eternity with God, and before there existed a created being who could be brought to blessedness through Him, the eternal Word of the blessed God was Life and Blessedness (1 Tim. vi. 15). As Origen justly says: “The Father could not be personal if the Son were not.”

But, in order that the blessed Life, which was with God in the eternal Word, might be shared by creatures to the praise of that Love, which would fain impart of her own, God created a world, and created it through that same Word, in whom, from all eternity, He had been the object of His love.

Ver. 3. “*All things were made* (came into being) *by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.*”

The Word was: all things have *come into being* through the Word. Everything—yes, every individual thing, from the angel on high to the worm in the dust, is indebted for its existence to the Word. Nothing appears existent, which may be supposed not to have *come* into being; and nothing has come into being that we can suppose not to have been called into being by the eternal, uncreated *Word*. This Son is not included in the order of creatures, for they have come into being through Him, therefore He must be their Creator; and that, not as if the Son had only carried out the creative Will of the Father, as His instrument; rather the Son is Himself the revealed Will of the Father, and it is in this Will that the cause

of the creation lies. This is what the apostle Paul expresses in Col. i. 16 : " IN Him [for so it is in the Greek] were all things created that are in heaven and in earth ;" and, in order to show that He, through whom all things were created, was likewise beforehand contemplated as that in which every created thing was to have its life, he further adds ; " All things were created by Him and FOR Him, and He is before all things, and *by* Him [Greek, *in* Him] all things consist."

" *I have glorified Thee on the earth,*" the Son says, in his sacerdotal prayer. Therewith was the work of Divine Love victoriously completed, which had its commencement when the world was created *by* the Word and *for* the Word, for the end, that is, of becoming participant in the glory which the Word had with God from all eternity.

Here let us pause for a moment, in order that we may rightly take hold of the comfort arising out of this article of faith ; for it is one which the holy John—"the crop and flower of the Evangelists"—has, in words such as these, laid down with a hand of no ordinary power. He carries our Lord Jesus Christ far above Adam and all created beings, up into a boundless eternity, and bids us recognise in Him the eternal Word, who was in the beginning, "or ever the earth or the world were formed ;" and who was with God as His beloved Son ; who Himself was God, of one essence with the Father, through whom every creature was called into being. With such power does the apostle set forth the true Godhead of Christ, in order that our faith may have in the Scriptures a foundation which cannot totter. Joyfully may we venture to put our trust in this Christ ; for He is no creature, but very God (Jer. xvii. 5). Our salvation is rooted in this Word,—Who was in the beginning with God (Eph. i. 4). He who has redeemed us with His precious blood, He is the same who has also created us ; for no less a Being it behoved Him to be, who should redeem mankind when lost, than He is, by whom and for whom, mankind was originally created.

Jesus Christ is very God: this confession is the Church's jewel of consolation. "How could we obtain salvation if it had not been God who has wrought salvation?—or how can man come into fellowship with God, if God has not come to man? How was it possible that Christ should overcome the strong one, who held man under his dominion, and let the vanquished go free, if He were not Himself stronger than man who had been vanquished?" (Irenæus). Luther is never weary of urging this doctrine. He says: "This article of our salvation and happiness we never can, by human wisdom, grasp and comprehend; but believe it we must, as the Scriptures speak of it, and hereto hold fast, that Christ our Lord is very essential God, equal to the Father in His Divine Being and Nature. If Christ remain not very essential God, born of the Father from all eternity, and the Creator of all things, then we are lost. For what help should I get with the Lord Jesus Christ's suffering and death, if He were but a man like you and me? In that case he could not have overcome the devil, and death, and sin; He would have been far too weak for them. Therefore we must have such a Saviour as the Bible tells us of,—one who is very God, and Lord over sin, death, devil, and hell. If, as the Son of God, He sheds His blood for us, to redeem us and cleanse us from sin; and if we believe it, and hold it out before the devil's face, when he frightens and torments us on account of sins, then is the devil soon beat—he *must* yield, and leave us in peace. With this beginning of John's Gospel, and with the Nicene Creed, we can with main force strike down the devil and all heretics that ever were or can be. For although heretics at one time were boldly taking in hand, and that too with a splendid show, according to reason, to tutor this Gospel, and to pervert it, yet their folly in the end became manifest; it got condemned openly by Christendom as a lie of the devil's, and it perished in shame and confusion." (Luther).

All things were made by the Word; but that same Word who

is the free cause of their *coming* into being is also the sole ground of their *subsisting* in being (chap. v. 17.)

Ver. 4. "*In Him was Life.*"

The essence of the Word is indeed *Life*, for He is God (chap. v. 26); and all things that live draw their vital power only from Him, for out of God there is no life. St. John knows only one Life, that which is Divine, blessed and in itself eternally perfect; whatever renounces its union with God, falls under death, and whatever does not return back to God, remains in death. Whatever boasts itself of Life apart from and without God is but death, masked. In St. John's mouth, the noble name, *Life* (54 times does it occur in the gospel), constantly includes the notion of a Divine Life. In our language, we speak indeed, (as also the Scriptures do occasionally), of a life without God, a sinful, worldly, earthly, perishable, unblest life; St. John on the contrary, accords the name of *Life* exclusively to that which is essentially Life, namely, that Life which has its origin in the Divine Fulness of Life, and its continuance in communion with God. When God saw all that He had made, "and behold it was very good," He saw pure Life emanating from His life, and His complacency rested upon every creature.

Imperishable Life and unfading bloom poured themselves abroad without intermission from the Fountain of all Life. But ever since the earth and all it contains have no longer been "very good," but through sin, are spoilt and torn away from God, death has got the mastery (Rom. viii. 20), but also since that time and to the present hour, still there lives, what, in the midst of a pining and perishing world has Life, but it has it only in Him whose love is stronger than death, and whose breath of Life renews the face of the earth (Acts xvii. 18; Col. i. 18; Heb. i. 3.)

Hitherto, the apostle has been leading us to recognize the eternal Word as the Fountain of Life to "all things;" now he goes still further, and tells us what in particular *men* have in

the eternal Word. Now John is giving the cone its apex ; we see he is making a bend to come round upon the region of humanity ; at length he turns right upon it and speaks :

"And the Life was the light of men."

The life of the eternal Word, the Upholder and Preserver of *all things*, was *the light of men*.

Of all the creatures upon the earth, man, created after the image of God, alone *acknowledges* the Life which fills him ; only man can say, " I live, God is my Life," for he alone is a person, an "I," through which has sounded a Voice from the Divine Life (Gen. ii. 17), "the living soul" (in Hebrew "breath of Life") breathed into his nostrils by God, speaks in his heart and says: "I live, Thou Lord, my God, art my Life." On that account, then, because fellowship with that Life which the eternal Word has and is, shews itself in the spirit of man as a loving acknowledgment of God, the apostle says: "The Life was the Light of men." Earthly light is clear and makes clear ; it shines and it enlightens ; in the Scriptures it is the constant image of God who is spirit, of Him who is holy and makes holy, who is the living One and deals forth Life, who is true and leads to Truth ; "With Thee is the fountain of Life, in Thy Light shall we see Light."

In nature, life and light are inseparably joined together ; and it is so in the region of spirit ; where there exists divine, holy Life, there exists also, divine holy Light, and where there is Light, there is also Life. Our apostle knows no Light that would deserve to be so called unless it beamed forth from the Life of the eternal Light (chap. viii. 12, ix. 5, xii. 35. 1 John ii. 8-10.)

Out of God in Christ there is no Light, but mere darkness, also out of Him there is no Life, only mere death. In Christ is the Light of Life, out of Christ is the night of death.

"These words : *In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men*, are thunderclaps against the light of reason, free will,

the powers of man, etc. As if he would say : All men who are out of Christ are destitute of Life before God, are dead and damned. For how should they have Life, when they not only wander in darkness, but are themselves darkness?" (Luther.)

The Life *was* the Light of men, *i.e.*, from the beginning, as long as there have been men. Just as the eternal Word *was* God in the beginning, so He *was* also from the beginning the Life and the Light of men. It is true, when in the track of sin, death and darkness came upon men, it seemed as if Life and Light must be for ever extinguished in the world, Paradise being now lost, even as they are eternally extinguished in the habitation of the devil and his angels. (Jude 6.) But no ! Praised be eternal Love which stoops to misguided sinners with her Life to overcome Death, with her Light to overcome Darkness !

Ver. 5. "*And the Light shineth in darkness.*"

The Light was from the beginning the Light of men, *and therefore*, as the Light of men, it now, since darkness has befallen men, *shines in darkness*. In Paradise, all was full of Life and full of Light. It cannot properly be said that the Light *shone* in Paradise, rather Paradise itself shone like a world of Light. But ever since sin is come into the world, and mankind, estranged from holy Life which is in the Love of God, has walked in darkness instead of in Light, since this has been the case, the Light has shone "in a dark place" (2 Peter i. 19), in the very midst of darkness, and the gloomier the darkness, so much the brighter beams the fair splendour of that Light (Rom. v. 20).

But *how* does the light shine in darkness ? Read Gen. iii. 15 : it is there that the first beam of Light falls on poor darkened earth, in what has been well termed "the first Gospel of salvation." The Life which was from the beginning, the Light of men, now shines as a sweet light of mercy to sinners ; the eternal Word, first the Creator of a world of holiness of Life and

Light, here begins to reveal Himself as a Redeemer, to a world become full of sin and darkness, and drowned in death. All that Divine Love has ever set on foot, for the redemption of fallen humanity, from the first promise of the victorious seed of the woman, which should bruise the serpent's head, up to the fulfilment of this promise, all of it together, has been a *shining of the Light in darkness*. How powerfully did the Light pour its brightness into darkness, when a Noah and an Abraham and a Moses, and at length the combined covenant people of God, shone as the depositaries of its illumination !

The whole economy of the Old Covenant is illuminated throughout by the light of salvation, proffering itself to sinners ; the promise, the law, the service of God with its types, are all a beaming forth of the Light, which was thus struggling with the darkness, and essaying to overcome its gloom.

Christ is the entire sum of whatever Light is seen to shine in the whole of the Old Testament.

Ay, even those nations, which antecedently to the illuminations of the published Gospel, have strayed afar "in their own ways" (Acts xiv. 16, 17),—even them, has the Light of men never left wholly unvisited in their darkness. God was never far from them, although they had removed themselves far from God. Some sparks of Light were wont to fly out, even into the dark hearts of heathens ; for the Creation, though there was no word, preached to them of the living God ; and their conscience proclaimed His law (Rom. i. 20, ii. 15), and numberless sacrifices of the heathen betoken the "thoughts" of conscience, which accuse, or else excuse, one another.

With noiseless, yet mighty step, the living God stalks through the whole history of nations, and even the loud bustle of their own footsteps does not in every human ear, overpower the sound of this secret, awful march of God.

The revelation of God in His righteous judgments, has in every time shone with lightning brilliancy into the darkness

of the world, and does so still ; that warning of the 2nd Psalm : “ Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,” still, above the raging sea of the people, makes itself clearly heard.

But how fares it with the Light which would thus fain draw men out of darkness into its own brightness?

“ *And the darkness comprehended it not.*”

St. John here styles those who would not let themselves be illuminated by the Light, as *Darkness*. All those, and there were many, who *loved* darkness rather than Light, and who were so entirely lost in darkness, that they are to be themselves called darkness, those did not grasp the Light that was shining on them, nor hold it fast.

St. Paul expresses precisely the same thing, when he says : “ men who hold (literally *keep down*) the Truth in unrighteousness ” (Rom. i. 18), the love of unrighteousness stifles the spark of Truth thrown by the Light into their hearts, so that it cannot blaze up, or freely shine forth. Therefore no man lost in darkness has any excuse. The darkness in which all of us without distinction, by nature are sunk,—*this* will not be the cause of our damnation, for the Light shines in darkness, and is both willing and able to overcome it ; but the love of darkness making us indisposed to lay hold on the Light, this it is which will condemn us if we die in it. True indeed, not darkness only, but also the love of darkness, is our inheritance as sinners ; but surely it is also true, that the Light, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, shines upon us so sweetly and attractively, that if only we do yield ourselves to His illumination, if we do not meet it with gloomy resistance, then that love to Him which He works within us, overcomes our natural love of darkness, breaks its power and expels it from our bosoms. And accordingly, the eternal Word ever since it has shone in darkness, has in every age found some who have stretched themselves out towards Him, and who would not, when they saw the Light, remain in darkness any longer (comp. ver. 12, with ver. 11); but these have

been but few. "The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Rom. xi. 7).

It is with a profound emotion of melancholy that St. John contemplates that labour of love which the eternal Word has carried on with our sinful race, and we cannot fail to detect in the words which he here uses, in which he records the general history of the world and of all its nations, an accent of grief and sorrow. "The light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not."

Let us not read these words without fastening upon our own hearts, and pondering what we find *there*; for not without meaning is it written, "The Light *shineth*,"—not *shone*, but "*shineth* in darkness." O how much brighter does it shine upon us than it does among the heathen, or even than it did under the old covenant! "The darkness is past, and the true Light now shineth,"—such is St. John's announcement; let us then walk as children of the Light and as children of the day.

But did not the Light grow weary of shining, having shone for the most part in vain through the space of 4000 years? No, it did not grow weary, but rather waxed stronger and stronger in giving Light. "Although the blind wicked world does not desire the blessed Light,—ay, though it cannot endure it, but persecutes and blasphemes it, yet through the wonderful mercy of the true, eternal Light, it shines still for the sake of the little flock who are to be enlightened by it. It does not set on account of the unthankfulness and contempt of the great godless mass" (Luther). True, we hear as early as from Isaiah's mouth, the mournful complaint of the Messiah: "I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain" (Isa. xlix. 4); nevertheless, how clearly, just in this very chapter, is the "Light given to the Gentiles" seen to shine as the salvation of God even to the ends of the earth. How clearly the accepted time and the day of salvation stands here

before the eyes of the Prophet, who saw the most distinctly of all, the glory of the eternal Word (chap. xii. 41), when, with accents of mercy never before heard, the Lord was to "say to the prisoners: Go forth! and to them that are in darkness: Shew yourselves!" This time arrived; the Light of men, uncomprehended by the darkness, but yet not weakened in those yearnings of its love which led it to seek to rescue men out of their darkness;—that Light poured its beams among mankind in perfect fulness, "bodily;" the eternal Word became Flesh, in order that men, who are flesh, might be able to see His glory. Yet before this all-mild, all-precious shining of the Light was revealed amid the darkness to the eyes of men, it was preceded by a herald, an "angel;" yet one more Prophet, the greatest among them all, was to testify of the Light; and thus in hearts which were longing for and expecting salvation, make ready the way for its manifestation:

Ver. 6. "*There was a man sent from God whose name was John.*"

A *man*, one out of that little company which had comprehended the Light shining in darkness, was sent forth by the true Light on an errand to men. The apostle, in this verse, accurately portrays the last witness belonging to the Old Testament, whose finger indeed stretches itself over into the New Testament: as to his person, he "was [was born] a man;" as to his office, "sent from God;" as to his name, he "was called John."

He was *sent* by God, in fulfilment of the promise: "Behold I will send my messenger [angel] before me" (Mal. iii. 1). He was called John, "God-gracious;" "he was not to be called by a chance name like other people, but by a name which was to bring the very reality which it means along with it,—which is what all names do that God makes and gives" (Luther). But what made him a real "God-gracious" was not his person, but the office of witness which was given him by God, and the

substance of his testimony which was full of God's mercy and grace.

Ver. 7, 8. "*The same came for a witness to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.*"

John Baptist's mission was to bear witness, and indeed to bear witness of the Light, which he himself had recognized, and by *experience* knew to be the true Light (ver. 31); for it is only what has been known by experience that can be borne witness to. John could attest on his oath that this Jesus was the Son of God. It is indeed true that the discourse of all Prophets, relative to the future Christ, is a *witness* of truth known by experience (1 Pet. i. 11), for the Spirit of Christ was in them, and in the Spirit they saw Him (chap. viii. 56, xii. 41); but herein is John's witness alone in its kind, that it points with the finger to the *present* Christ, as to Him in whom all the promises of the Prophets are Yea and Amen (ver. 26).

The object of John's witness was, "*that all men through him (not on him) might believe.*" How highly does the Lord Christ, here honour the spoken word! Even as He Himself lived and moved in the written word of the Old Testament, and drew from it comfort in his heaviest hours; so in the mouth of St. John He gives to this word a voice, in order that all might hear the "report," and thus gain that faith which comes by "hearing;" (Rom. x. 17). "Let us take particular note of this, that John was sent from God to bear witness of the Light, *that all through him might believe.* For the Anabaptists, and similar hurtful poisonous visionaries, are always giving out, as you often hear, (and highly necessary it is that you be warned to be on your guard against them,) the Spirit, the Spirit must do it. 'What is the use,' say they, 'of hearing the outward word, of trusting to *that*, as if it was to be the way and means through which we come to the faith and receive the Spirit, all the while that it is nothing more than written with pen and ink, and the moment it is read, passes away into air and is gone?' Thus mockingly

do they blaspheme the blessed Word of which John was called and sent by God Himself to bear witness ; just as if John were a monstrous excrescence, whose testimony we did not want. But here we see that the Evangelist extols John the Baptist, and tells us that his office could not be dispensed with. For he bears witness of Christ, and points to Him who is the Life and Light that enlightens all men ; by which he indicates that the outward word is serviceable for bringing about this very end of our coming to faith and receiving the Holy Ghost. For God has determined that no one shall or can believe or receive the Holy Ghost without the Gospel which is preached, or by word of mouth taught" (Luther).

All men, through John's testimony, were to believe. God's gracious purpose towards Israel was *universal*. All were earnestly called upon, through John, to come to Christ ; but the greater part rejected the counsel of God (Luke vii. 30) ; only a very small company, amongst them the Evangelist John himself, allowed themselves through the Baptist's testimony to be brought to Christ. Our apostle is well able to affirm that it was not God's fault that all did not believe through the preaching of John the Baptist. For see ! he himself had believed.

The connexion shews that this word *all* applies primarily to the people of Israel. But, at the same time, it includes all among us. For faith in Christ flourishes only in them, who in their consciences have been convicted and terrified by that law which John's voice proclaims, and who are *thus* led to take refuge in the *Lamb* of God to whom John's testimony points.

Bearing witness of the Light, John was himself *a* light, a burning and a shining light (chap. v. 35) as the Lord calls him ; but he was not *the* Light ; and it is exactly in this that his greatness consists, that he himself *knew* that he was not (chap. i. 20, 27). Believers are shining lights in the dark world (Phil. ii. 15), and the community in which Christ dwells is called "the light of the world" (Matt. v. 14), but it is only because "our Light is come" that we *become* light (Isa. lx. 1) ; Christ alone

is the Light (Eph. v. 8); and having become light from Him, we bear witness of the Light; and as we are called Christians from Christ, so are we called lights from the eternal Light. This is in particular the modest and highly prized vocation of every single servant of Christ (1 Cor. iii. 5). "Their whole office and testimony must tend to this end, that they bear witness to this Light and Life, and extol the same to the souls of all around them, and point their eye to Him alone, declaring that He is the Lord, and they only His servants. His beauty, how white and ruddy (Cant. v. 10); His glorious mercy, His wealth in all heavenly treasures,—all this they must place before souls and not glorify themselves, or seek their own praise" (Bogatzky). Woe to the preacher who finds too little for himself the praise that was given to the greatest of the Prophets: "*He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.*" "For if they set forth in view themselves instead of Christ, they give light no otherwise than as a bit of snuff or dirt in the flame of the lantern, which may stink, but light it does not give" (Luther). "Just as when we see some object lit up by the sun's beams, we are aware that the sun has risen, though we may not be able actually to see him ourselves; and just as a man, however weak may be his power of sight, at any rate is able to look at a mountain or tree shone upon by the sun, though he may not yet be able to look at the glorious luminary itself: so in like manner did John give light to those who as yet were not able to look at Christ, and through him, while he acknowledged that his light was that cast upon him by the rays of another, the shining and enlightening One Himself was perceived and recognized" (Augustine). Yes, the Sun was rising:

Ver. 9. "*That was the true Light, which lighteth every man, that cometh [was coming] into the world.*"

When John the Baptist made his voice to be heard, the true Light, of whom he witnessed, had already appeared in a personal form, in the Son of the blessed Virgin. But the apostle's eye at present is resting on the time when the Saviour was living in

the retirement of Nazareth, until He came to John to be baptised by him ; therefore he says, "*He was coming.*" He was *just on the point of coming*, He was rising even as the morning sun gradually rises upon the earth. The words, *coming into the world*," belong not to "*every man*," but to "the true Light." Never in the New Testament is it said of the birth of men, that they "come into the world," and even the Jewish expression : "all who come into the world," is a periphrasis only of the term *man*, which term could not also stand along with it. But it is on the other hand most strictly true of our Lord Jesus that He has *come into the world*, since he is not of the world, but descended to this dark earth, from heaven, the abode of light and glory. At the same time, however, this "He was coming" of St. John, with a loud voice reminds us of the promise in Malachi [iii. 1.] : "Behold He shall come," as a promise which was now being fulfilled. He who in Malachi was to come, was even now coming.

Christ, the eternal Word, is the *true* Light. His eternal nature is perfect Light ; full of serene majesty is He ; whoever else has light, as for example, John the Baptist, has only received it as a gift of Grace, imparted to him out of His infinite fulness. For this reason also is He the true Light, viz : because He lights *every man*, not *one* people or *one* race merely, but every man. "Teach *all* nations ;" such is the command of the true Light. For the illumination of every man is this Light appointed to shine ; he who does not withdraw himself from Him, receives light, and every one who ever does receive light, gets it from this Light, or else from none at all. Even "lovers of darkness," know something of this, that the Light of redeeming Love is beaming upon them ; but that it retires and withdraws before their hatred,—this is their condemnation and judgment. "But it is not the fault of the Light, I mean, of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all are not enlightened, or even that it is only the smaller part of mankind that is so. For He is called and truly is, the Light of the world, and of all men, and shines also ever and ever ;

He is also appointed by God to be so : see Isaiah xlix. 6. The fulfilment of this promise in Isaiah was soon to be in full swing in the Apostles' time (Acts xiii. 47.) For the Gospel has resounded as far as the sky extends, it has given forth its light and splendour throughout the whole world. But the fact that all did not receive, nor do now receive the blessed Light, (they feel the brightness and light of our doctrine, it is true, but they will not see it,) does not forfeit to the Light its name, neither does it lose it its honour." (Luther.) Beautifully writes *Johu Brenz* : "The earthly sunlight only illumines eyes *that see*, but Christ the true Light enlightens the eyes of the *blind* ; He is at once the *Eye and Light* of the world."

And *what is the result* of the enlightenment which the true Light gives to those who receive Him ? The Apostle tells us in ver. 12 : "He gave them power to become the sons of God."

As, after saying [in ver. 4.] "In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men," the Apostle adds with painful emotion the words : "And the Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not ;"—so in like manner, immediately after the joyful intelligence of the coming of the "Light of men" into the world, for the illumination of all mankind, there follows the mournful complaint :

Ver. 8. "*He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.*"

He was in the world : St John's gaze is still fixed on the true Light, who is the eternal Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore he says directly, *He*. Yes, He was now in the world, and indeed in a different way from that in which from the beginning He had shone amid the world's darkness : He was *come* into the world. "In His Divine Nature He was in the world from the beginning ; He *came* into the world in the flesh, because the blind did not see Him in His Godhead." (Augustine.)

What before was called "all things," St. John here no less than four times names "the world." With that word, "*world*," (it occurs sixty-eight times in the course of the Gospel,) there

is always associated in his mind a thought of pain. Darkness has marred the lightsome work of the Creator, and has made it into "*the world*." Mankind, who have wandered out of the Light of Life, and lost themselves in the darkness of death, these are become *world*. "Corrupted mankind are called the *world*, because they love the world more than their Creator. Through love, we make something our dwelling-place; and therefore what we have made by our love to be our dwelling-place, from that we have deserved to be called" (Augustine). Comp. especially 1 John ii. 15—17.

Yet St. John distinguishes between world and world. The *whole* world is a *lost* world; yet in Christ, God has had pity upon it, and would fain by His love draw it out of destruction (chap. iii. 16); but *the* world which despises such love, and, in antagonism against Christ, *continues* world, under its Prince and Captain, the Devil, is a *rejected* world, for which the High Priest does not pray (chap. xvii. 9).

The world should with songs of adoration have celebrated the arrival in the flesh of the eternal Word; but it is only angels, (whose nature he did not take on Him,) that we hear in the silent plains of Bethlehem singing His praise. "*He was in the world*," and it had Him near enough to know Him; yea, it had in Him its own Creator before its very eyes: "*and the world was made by Him*." Ought not the creature to have known its Creator?—"and the world knew Him not;" so darkened had it become, so estranged from its original image, that it no longer knew the Author and Preserver of its being! There is something indescribably melancholy in these words: "He was in the world—and the world was made by Him—and the world knew Him not!" And yet the Apostle has something still more grievous to add,—a thing which recalls to our mind the Saviour's tears over Jerusalem:

Ver. 11. "*He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.*"

"Hear, O Heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath

spoken : I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib ; but *Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider.*"

From out of the world, the work of His hand, the Lord had long ago singled a people, as the object of his tender love and care, to share the confidence of His Heart, and to be the depository of His revelations. That nation the Lord of the whole earth chose before all nations to be His own *peculiar treasure*, in order that, as a nation of *Priests*, it might, under the kingly protection of its God, cherish, guard, and be the means of forwarding the salvation designed for all people ; to them, also, among their other saving blessings (Rom. ix. 5.), pertained *the Glory*, that is, the glorious dwelling-place (Shekinah) of the *eternal Word* (the angel of the Covenant) in the midst of the people, revealing Himself in the pillar of cloud and of fire in the tabernacle and in the temple. "The Lord his God is with him and the shout of a King is among them" (Numbers xxiii. 21). That they were a people of Christ, whilst the other nations were without Christ (Eph. xi. 12), this it was that formed the glory of this people. This glory, which had been Israel's delight from of old, and its longing since the days of its captivity (Malachi iii. 1), had now shone upon them, full of grace, and dwelt bodily in the holy temple furnished in the Humanity of the eternal Word. *Thus* did He come unto His own ! He was in the world, a man amongst men ; He came unto His own as the promised Seed of Abraham, as the longed for Hero of the stem of Judah, as the Star out of Jacob and as the Sceptre from Israel, as the long desired Son of David, as the Prophet raised up unto the people from among His brethren like unto Moses, Jew among the Jews ; but as the dark, benighted world no longer knew Him who was their Creator, so in like manner, the peculiar people, faithless to the covenant, no longer knew Him whose own it was ; "*and His own received Him not.*" "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dear, my undefiled," says the heavenly Solomon to the daughter

of Zion; but the sluggard received Him not, and He went His way (chap. viii. 21). Yes, the Scriptures must be fulfilled, the heathen are beforehand with the peculiar people in receiving salvation; for, as a nation, it has rejected its King: "From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the Righteous. But I said: My leanness, my leanness! *Woe unto me! For the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously, yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.*"

The apostle calls even those *His own* who yet did not receive Him, in the same way as the Saviour Himself speaks of those who were "cast out," still as *children of the Kingdom, and children of Wisdom* (Matt. viii. 12), of whom however she was [justified] declared free (Matt. xi. 19). What a torment for the damned there must be in this name, "*His own!*" Oh, that whenever He bestows any favour upon us as His own, as His members, we may with fear and trembling reflect that it will be to us either a cause of eternal rejoicing, or of eternal lamentation! "The coals of fire" of His despised love,—these are they that will add its most fearful intensity to the fire that never shall be quenched.

"*His own received Him not.*" In vain had the Advent hymns of the Old Testament (as Psalm ci.) sounded the melody: "How shall I receive Thee?" In vain had the last of the Prophets cried: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" His own, whom *He* had received into His loving guardianship, received not *Him*; no joyful applause, no submissive homage, welcomed the King of Israel. "In the Apostle's view, it means more that His own did *not receive Him*, than that the world did *not know him*. 'The world knew Him not;' this shews the lamentable blindness of fallen nature, which by its own strength and reason is unable to know Christ. 'His own,'—who possessed the word of revelation—did not receive Him; this is a proof of that most extreme wickedness combined with blindness, with which they withstood the Holy Spirit, who, through the Word given unto them, would now fain have enlightened them." (Chemnitz.)

Luther plainly sees the storm of God's wrath gathering over his beloved Germany, which the Lord had so graciously visited with His Voice and "received as His own," because, as he feels, it had not known the visitation which had been so mercifully accorded to it. Alas, how fearful is the fulfilment which his prophetic forebodings are now meeting with! Say unto the King and to the Queen: "Humble yourselves, sit down, for principalities shall come down, even the crown of your glory" (Jer. xiii. 10).

Hitherto, John has been speaking of the "peculiar people" *as a whole*, and accordingly in the words, "His own received Him not," he has uttered his lamentation over the rejection of the hereditary King of Israel. But now his eye brightens, for it falls on the *remnant* of the inheritance, ay, and on the branches of the wild olive-tree, too, that are grafted into the good olive tree,—on the "daughters of Jerusalem," who are planted in the lily gardens of the heavenly Solomon.

Ver. 12, 13. "*But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

Wherefore, O John, didst thou say nothing concerning the punishment of those who did *not* receive Him? Alas, what greater punishment could they have than that of being deprived, through the guilt of their unbelief, of the power which was offered to them of becoming the sons of God!

Here we see the *reason why* so few of His own received Him. That "power" and honour which Christ gives to His faithful ones, deluded Israel did not desire to possess; for it was rather expecting in its Messiah a Gideon and a Sampson, who should deliver his people out of the hands of the Midianites and Philistines of that time, the Romans. That *sonship with God* is obtained by virtue of the "*power*" and right which God confers, Israel knew well enough; but that the faithful reception of the only begotten Son of God, and that alone, should be the way

of gaining true sonship, was an unbearable announcement to those sinners, reposing as they were in proud security on their descent from Abraham. This ever has been and will always continue to be the grand point on which all depends, that only he who receives Christ in faith, and with adoring reverence gives honour to His name and to His revealed Glory as the only begotten Son of the Father, only he, and none besides, receives power to become a child of God. To Christ, sonship with God belongs by nature, He *is* the Son of God; to man, on the contrary, ruined by sin, and sunk in the depths of the flesh, the sonship does *not* belong by nature (by nature he is a child of wrath); he can only be a child of God by *becoming* so; and the "power" which enables us to become so is faith, which lays hold on the name of Jesus Christ, so that what is Jesus Christ's becomes *ours* also, "that He might be the First-born among many brethren." The *God-man* has obtained for us the power to become *God's-men*. Because Jesus Christ is become my Brother, I joyfully cry to the Father of my Brother, "Abba, Father!" To no other right do I appeal, no other power do I know, than the right and the power of *faith*, which gives me to exult and say: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God." When Philip Melancthon was dying, he said aloud and distinctly to his surrounding friends: "I have those words of John concerning the Son of God, my Lord Jesus Christ, before me continually, *The world received Him not, but as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.*"

The evangelist is evidently anxious that sonship with God should be acknowledged to be what it is, a pure gift of free grace, imparted out of the fulness of the only-begotten Son; therefore it is that he adds so emphatically, that those who are by faith endued with the power of sonship, are born, *not of blood*, the source of our natural life, *nor of the will of the flesh*, which is the cause of the natural birth, even though it should be the

will of a distinguished *man* (comp. the use of the word *man* in Psa. iv. 2, and xlix. 12—*high* in the English version stands for *sons of men* in the Hebrew), of a hero, or some paragon of a philosopher,—because “that which is born of the flesh is flesh” and no more; and, therefore, nature left to itself and infected by sin, is altogether destitute of the hero-quality which might give a man power to become a child of God. It is true that the will of man in heathenism has endeavoured and does so still, to produce children of God, but the apotheosis of human nature has never been able to attain the blessing of the Divine nature; *this* children *born of God* alone can share (2 Pet. i. 4). We are utterly unable to mount up to God, except God first comes down to us. “It was impossible,” says Athanasius, “that our nature, subjected as it was to corruption, could rise to immortality, if the immortal nature did not communicate to us of its Being, and thereby renew us and raise us out of the region of rottenness to the possession of its own glory.” “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us;” it is from thence alone that we receive power in the flesh to share the life of the Son of God as God’s true children, as younger brethren of the first-born, and conformed to His divine image (Col. i. 15; Rom. viii. 29). As Luther says: “This Jesus Christ our Lord alone brings this birth, He alone gives to them who believe on Him the right and power to become the children of God; it is the Son alone who gives the right of sonship;” or as Chrysostom explains the connection between the 13th and 14th verses: “The dearly beloved Son of God became the Son of Man, in order that He might make out of the children of men the children of God.” The thought which St. John expresses in this 13th verse is repeated by St. Paul in Gal. vi. 15, in these words: “*In Christ Jesus*, neither *circumcision* availeth anything, nor *uncircumcision*, but a *new creature*.” (Comp. also Gal. iii. 28; v. 6; 2 Cor. v. 16, &c.; 1 Cor. i. 18-31. In Adam we were brought out of nothing into being, but in Christ we are created anew into union with God from godlessness, from being children of wrath into children

of love, namely, *that* love which Jesus Christ has regained for us, and which in the Gospel lays hold on ("apprehends," Phil. iii. 12) us, that we in faith might in turn lay hold of it. This is the way of grace.

"Here thou must put away from thine eyes all that the world counts high, and great, and splendid, ay, thou must forget every creature. For all that comes of us belongs to hell, it is sentenced and condemned to death. Nothing avails here except being born of God, through faith in the Son of God, who has become flesh." (Luther).

But now the holy Apostle bursts out into a glorious confession of this *Name* in which he believes ; he wishes, from most blessed experience, to make known the secret of this Name. He says :

Ver. 14. "*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ;—and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father,—full of grace and truth.*"

It is *thus* we receive Him, it is *thus* we believe in His name, St. John means to say. The evangelist also commences this verse with "*And ;*" not as if he were here speaking for the first time of the *coming* of the eternal Word, but because now, his heart leads him to make known the adorable *manner* of his coming, and also, because it is here that he first expressly includes *himself* in the number of God's children, of those that believe on the Word which was made flesh. "*Yes, I proclaim with joy this my Gospel (1 John i. 1, &c.), THE WORD BECAME FLESH !*"—The Word, which was in the beginning, from all eternity the Life and the true Light—this Word became flesh. He did not cease to be what he was before, but he became what he before was not : *flesh*. The apostle does not say : The Word became *man*—though that also would have been true—but : the Word became *flesh*. "*God is manifest in the flesh*" (1 Tim. i. 16).

Human nature, as it is in consequence of sin, in its weakness and mortality, is called in holy Scripture *flesh* : "He remembereth that they are but *flesh*." (Comp. Deut. v. 26 ; Isa. x. 4, 5, 6 ; Joel iii. 1 ; St. Matt. xxvi. 41). In this *flesh* did Jesus Christ

come; "because the children of men have flesh and blood, He Himself likewise *took part* in the same;" "*in the likeness of sinful flesh*" did He appear, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and "in the days of His flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears." "All that deep humility, which no tongue can fully tell, the Evangelist in the little word *flesh* desires to point out to our attention." (Luther.)

"He might, to be sure, easily have created a new human nature to take upon Himself,—a nature which should have been more rich and glorious than it had been in Adam before the Fall; but He chose rather taking *our* nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin;—this nature which, on account of the frailty, weakness, and misery with which it is laden by reason of sin, is called *flesh*." (Chemnitz). Having become flesh, though without sin, Christ, whilst He bears *our sins*, bears also the consequences, the *punishment of our sins*, in His flesh (1 Pet. ii. 24; iii. 18), in order that for our flesh itself He might obtain redemption and glorification, after that in His own person, all poverty of the flesh and all the woes of death should have been swallowed up in His indissoluble and happy life. He is rich, and for our sakes became *poor*, "that we through His *poverty* might be rich." There properly belongs to His humanity, by virtue of its having been taken into the ever-rich Life of the Word, an infinite wealth of glory, which, from the moment of His incarnation, would, without ceasing, have beamed forth from it,—if the power of His love had not quenched that brightness, and made His flesh to be much more the veil to conceal His glory than the mirror to reflect its splendour. For He became flesh, not in appearance only, but in real earnest,—flesh of our flesh; His infinite, almighty Being He hemmed in within narrow limits, that, as a "finite and circumscribed man," He might become capable of human obedience and human suffering. This is the *humiliation* of the Word become flesh: that Jesus Christ *emptied* Himself of that form of Majesty which would properly have been the attribute of His human nature itself, by virtue of

its full participation with His Godhead, and took upon Him the *form of a servant*—became *flesh*—“*just like another man*, and was found in fashion as a man.”* Not as a robbery would He seize upon his exaltation in Divine Glory, but rather receive it as the reward of His obedience. We cannot comprehend how the Son of God, in the midst of His abasement, continued to be *God*, for it was however *He Himself* who emptied Himself and took the form of a servant ;—we cannot, I say, understand this ; but we know that what His love wills, that it can do ; and nowhere has the incomprehensible nature of God revealed itself in greater love than in this renunciation of His divine riches. Yes, God, who was rich from all eternity, became flesh, that is, became poor, and yet was still God, having all the while a wealth of love of which He could not empty Himself,—a love which then was saying : It is my *Will* to become thus poor !

“Thou mightest, O Emmanuel, have come into our vale of tears in the splendours of the *form of God*, if such had been Thy will. As the sun goes forth shining out of his chamber, so mightest Thou have come out of Thy blessed Mother’s womb in the light and in the guise of the Man who is Jehovah Himself. Then would the mountains have rejoiced and the hills have skipped for joy,—the trees before Thee would have blossomed and clapped their hands,—the sea would have made a noise before Thee,—and all creatures would have served Thee, and have laid themselves joyfully at Thy feet. Thus was not Thy will ! Thou didst not come as a Hero, resplendent with spoils ; Thy glory did not beam forth from Thee. Thou didst not desire the homage of the earth, neither did Thy heart go after it. The worship of Heaven Thou hadst received ; when the Father brought Thee into the world, all the angels sang to Thee songs of praises ;—how then could Thy soul delight in the praises of unredeemed sinners ? Thou *emptiedst Thyself*, Thou laidest down Thy glory on the threshold of the visible world, Thou becomest

* So Luther renders the words which in our version stand : “was made in the likeness of man, and being found in fashion as a man,” &c.

in all things like unto us (sin only excepted), and *tookest upon Thee the form of a servant.*" (Löhe).

The Word *became* flesh. Not as formerly in the old dispensation, when the Word occasionally clothed itself in some visible form, in order therein to reveal His presence, and then immediately to lay it aside again, but He *became* flesh : human nature became associated with the Godhead of the Word in the oneness of His person as God-man, so as to effect an union never to be dissolved. Godhead and manhood are in Christ one Person, enclosed in one *I*, "one Thing, one Being, therefore we can say with truth : this man *is* God, God *is* this man." (Luther). It is an expression which remarkably hits the truth relative to the mystery of the Incarnation, which we have in a Christmas carol, when, in speaking of the wind rushing through the stable of Bethlehem, it is said : "It plays upon the joints and limbs of God but newly made" ("frisch vermenschten Gott"). The Word did not become a man, a human person, but He became *Flesh* ; He took upon Him human nature, your flesh and my flesh ; as, virtually, all were assembled in Adam unto death, so, when Christ became flesh, He, as the second Adam, the Son of Man, virtually assembled all in Himself unto Life ; "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

"I have read of several instances in which a man not being suffered to rest by the devil, signed himself with the cross, and said : *The Word became flesh*,—much the same as if he had said, I am a Christian ;—and by this means, the devil was chased away and beaten down, and the man was left in peace. I can believe it to be true, provided that the words came from a believing heart. There is also a legend that, once upon a time, as the commencement of this St. John's Gospel was being read : 'In the beginning was the Word,' and so on, the devil was standing by, unmoved by what he heard, and continued listening very composedly until the reader got to the verse : '*and the Word became flesh*,' then the devil vanished. Now, whether this be a fiction, or whether it actually took place, matters little ;

at any rate it is the truth, that whoever from the heart, speaks these words, and steadily looks at them with real, true faith, the devil must flee from him. Without this, the devil can very well endure that the Son of God should be a Light and Life of men, and laughs in his heart to think that people do not receive Him (as St. John has said above, ver. 11). But all his thoughts are cut right asunder when it comes to this: *The Son of God is become flesh* " (Luther).

"*And dwelt among us.*" He who in the beginning was *God*, became *flesh*; and He who in the beginning was *with God*, dwelt *among us*. In the expression, to *dwell*, properly, to *pitch one's tent*, St. John glances at the tabernacle, the tent in which God dwelt with His chosen people; and it is as if he had said: now was raised the real tent, of which that first one was but a shadowy figure, only awakening a longing after something better, which is to be found here; the *Flesh* of the eternal Word is the real tabernacle. The prediction that God would dwell among His people, whether given by word, or by symbolical or typical act, was now to be completely fulfilled, and the communion of man with God, the restoration of which is the beginning and end of the sacred history, to be actually accomplished, when in Christ our flesh became the habitation of Divine Glory. Comp. Zech. ii. 10, viii. 3, with Ex. xxix. 45, and Lev. xxvi. 2; Isa. xl. 5; Jer. iii. 17; Mal. iii. 1.

The prophetic name of the Messiah—*Emmanuel*, God with us—is the true name of the incarnate Word; and this name will resound in the praises of the faithful, as it now does in the heavenly and earthly Jerusalem, which "has the Glory of God" (Rev. xxi. 3).

When the apostle speaks of the dwelling of the Word amongst us as *full of grace and truth*, he brings out into clearer view the fact, that then the Word was amongst us, not in type, or in some imperfect sense, but really and fully. Even under the old economy, the Word's near approach to the covenant people, and His dwelling among them, was a dwelling which brought grace

and salvation, and one which had its source in the love of God to sinners ; but yet *full* of grace, the complete outpouring of the whole fulness of Divine compassion—THIS it was not. It was, so to speak, only a single branch of fruit, as compared with the full vintage of the New Testament, that was allowed to the people of the old covenant,—only just a foretaste. It was reserved for the temple of Jesus Christ's body, in which, at the same time, the typical dwelling of the Word in the tabernacle and in the temple had its *truth*, its substance, to enclose the fulness of *grace*, the real substantial blessing. *Full of Truth*, the Word dwelt amongst us ; it was nothing less than *Himself*, the very Being of His own ever blest Life that he devoted to our nature, choosing it to Himself for His ever-during habitation. Full of Grace, He is our Life ; full of truth, He is our Light. Only let us receive Him, and then His grace and Truth covers us under the shadow of its wings ; we obtain mercy, we are truly in grace, we become the people of God (1 Pet. ii. 10).

“ Human nature was in Adam become an abomination in the sight of God, on account of sin ; but because the Word, who had been from all eternity the beloved Son, took upon Him human nature, the Father thus speaks of the whole Person of His Son, including also the nature which He took upon Him : “ This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ! ”

“ *We are accepted in the Beloved*,” as St. Paul, in Eph. i. 6, describes the grace, the fulness of which is in Christ. The fulness of grace in which God desires to embrace man, He has deposited in the incarnate Word, in order that there it might be sought, and there received.” (Chemnitz).

In the midst of uttering his announcement of the gracious and real dwelling of the eternal Word in our poor flesh, the apostle breaks forth with the words : “ *And we saw His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.* ”

This is the proper key-note, the one glorious and inexhaustible theme of the whole of St. John's Gospel : “ *We saw His glory !* ” That which was promised by Isaiah in that chapter

of his, so full of God's glory, the thirty-fifth: "*And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together,*" has now really appeared, full of grace and truth; and the evangelist is looking back on this Old Testament prophecy, whilst, with reference to it, he tells of his own and his brethren's New Testament experience: "*We saw His glory.*" *We*—St. John, and those who saw with his eyes—the little band of men who *received* Jesus. Those who did *not* receive Him saw not His glory; for in the days of His flesh it was an inward and a hidden glory, only visible to the eye of faith. There will be a time when the eyes, even of his enemies, will be forced to see Him, when He shall come to judgment in power and glory, unveiled to open view; but when He came to save the world, He came in a lowly form, and when at any time He permitted the glory which dwelt in Him as the Son, and which could not be lost, in some sudden gleams to break through that lowly servant garb, it was that He might allure men to a faith in Him which should save their souls (chap. ii. 11; xi. 40; xviii. 6), and not that He might constrain them to a mere carnal gaze, which could do them no good. It is to be further observed, that in these words St. John is not celebrating merely *that* glory which he had seen with the Saviour in His miracles, or on the mount of Transfiguration, or after his resurrection; but the whole of the gracious walk of the Lamb of God, who takes away, or bears, the sin of the world—the holy walk of love of that Jesus, who "spake as Shepherd and was silent as a Lamb"—His quiet life of sacrifice, and His innocent and bitter sufferings and death—all this is present before his ravished eye, when he says, "*We saw His glory.*" For is not His holy Passion full of brightness, above all the rest? Did not the thief, whose gaze was able to penetrate into the *kingdom* of the crucified One, and the centurion who recognised, hanging on the tree, the *Son of God*—(and St. John also was standing by the cross)—did not these see His glory visibly shining through all His shame?

Did not the very dying agony of the despised King of Glory preach to them of eternal Life, of imperishable Sovereignty, of Divine Majesty? When, rapt in deep reflection, we realise to ourselves the story of the Passion, our insight becomes clearer into the meaning of that disciple who, at the Last Supper, had lain on Jesus' breast, and, involuntarily, the adoring spirit joins with him in exclaiming: "*We saw His glory,*" a glory which belongs to none but to *the Only-begotten of the Father*. From the Father it was that He came forth, and came into the world,—from the Father, with whom He was in the beginning as *the only begotten Son*.

The *only begotten* Son, the apostle calls Christ,—“the eternal Father's *only* child,”—because it is *only* He, and none with Him, who stands for ever towards God in the relationship of a Son to a Father, and not as a creature to a Creator. The Father is the *only* Father of this only begotten Son; Both are One, because Each is essentially in the Other (chap. iii. 21; viii. 23; v. 18; x. 30; xvii. 23). That sinners should *become* God's children, is a gift of condescending Love—that astonishing mercy which imparts the glory of the Only-begotten to His brethren after the flesh, bestowing upon them a joint partnership therein. (Ver. 13; chap. xvii. 22). “*Many-begotten*” is what Luther calls the brethren of the Only-begotten.

We *saw* His glory. May the Lord open our eyes, that in the Jesus Christ whom the Gospel sets before us, we may perceive the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father, and that one day we may experience ineffable joy at *seeing Him again*, when with clearer eyes we shall behold Him as He is, and also the glory which the Father has given Him (chap. xvii. 24). They who *saw* His glory whilst they dwelt in the body, they, and only they it is, who *will* see His glory, when they are absent from the body and present for ever with Him.

May then our hearts burn within us, as He talks with us by the way, and opens to us the Scriptures; then shall we see Him with the “opened” eyes of our glorified body in the Emmaus

of the eternal home! "Oh, blessed, thrice blessed, are they who shall be counted worthy to see His Glory! If we should see it not, better would it be for us never to have been born. For to what end do we live? What are we without that sight? What could we do if the Lord, in that day, were to take away from us the contemplation of His Glory? If now the blind, who cannot see the light of the sun, lead a life more miserable than death, what, think you, will they suffer who shall be deprived of the true Light? For by so much as this Sun is brighter than the earthly sun, so much the more fearful will their torment be, who shall be forbidden to rejoice in Its Light for all eternity." (Chrysostom).

John the Baptist was among those who saw the Glory of the incarnate Word, and his testimony the Evangelist now adds to his own:—

Ver. 15. "*John bare witness of Him, and cried, saying: This was He of whom I spake: He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.*"

When John had baptized Jesus, with joyful confidence, "he cried aloud, and lifted up his voice," (Isa. lviii. 1) to testify of Him, and now more strongly affirmed of *this Jesus* what he had before spoken concerning the coming Christ. As a preparer of the way of the Lord, John had, in point of time, gone before Him; but he who comes *after* His messenger is yet *before* him, is *mightier* than he. He who is baptized as the "less" is yet "greater" than he who baptizes, although the greatest of the Prophets; and the messenger bows down in humility before the majesty of Him that sent him (Mal. iii. 1). In dignity, Christ stands *before* the Baptist, *after* whom He came in His office, because His person existed *before John*—before Abraham, before all things, for—"in the beginning was the Word." Before Christ became John's *successor*, was He his *Predecessor*, and on that account worthy of greater honour. (See Heb. iii. 3).

This testimony of the Baptist to the eternal Word who became flesh, the evangelist appropriates and makes his own, and,

expressing his own experience, as well as the Baptist's, and that of all believers, he thus continues :—

Ver. 16. “*And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.*”

The eternal Word dwelt among us *full* of grace and truth; the blessed Life of the ever-rich God was in perfect *fulness*, and, without measure, the property of the incarnate Word. “For it pleased the Father, that in Him should *all fulness* dwell.” The Lamb is worthy to receive the praise of His “riches” (Rev. v. 12); and St. Paul esteems it a gift of surprising grace, that he should “preach among the Gentiles the *unsearchable riches* of Christ” (Eph. iii. 8). But of the fulness of His riches have we all *received*—received what, as sinners, we neither possess in ourselves, nor can achieve by any efforts of our own, but can only receive as bestowed upon us by *grace* (1 Cor. iv. 7). That which, as a blessing appertaining to our original creation, we lost in Adam, we receive again, as a *gift of grace*, out of the fulness of Jesus Christ (Rom v. 17). And so inexhaustibly rich is His fulness, that not only all receive from it a full sufficiency, but each receiver of grace takes away *grace for grace*; for every grace received is the earnest of one yet to be received. When Nathanael came to believe in the Son of God, the Saviour said to him: “Because I saw thee under the fig-tree believest thou? *Thou shalt see greater things than these.*” How glorious must have been the experience which, during his long pilgrimage, the aged John had had of this blessed receiving of *grace for grace*! But, in truth, the whole Church, and every true disciple of Christ, according to his measure, has some experience of it. One day tells another how kind the Lord is, and His gifts, new every morning, are still continually pouring into such souls as by grace, already received, allow themselves to be made vessels increasingly receptive of grace which is still in reserve. “Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.” To crown all, the grace of faith will at last be overtopped with the grace of

sight. Yet, who knows whether even perfected saints will not, through eternity of eternities, be receiving *grace for grace* from the fulness of Jesus Christ? Who knows whether, above, the "five cities" will not still be ever multiplying into "ten cities?"

"This verse is one of St. John's golden texts. He who does not know Christ and has not made Him his own, is and remains a child of wrath and condemnation, be he who he will, or be he called who he will. And if he is to obtain grace, it must be through Christ alone; He only makes our poverty rich with His abundance; He only can drive away our sins with His righteousness, swallow up our death with His Life, and turn us from being children of wrath, filled with sin, hypocrisy, lies and falsehood, into children of grace and truth. He who has not *That* man, has nothing.

"If any one is to obtain grace, His fulness must do it: our crumbs and morsels, our tiny drops and bits,—they verily will not do it. All, whether Jews or Gentiles, if indeed they would obtain grace and be really found before God, are required (and indeed they *can do no other*) to fill their little flasks from this well,—a well which flows and overflows for ever and ever; they must drink their fill from this fountain-head of living water, springing up into eternal Life. In short, His fulness is without measure or end; therefore draw manfully and without fear, and drink with pleasure and joy! For here is overflowing enough, even into eternal Life; in this you will have enough to praise and thank God for to all eternity." (Luther).

Ver. 17. "*For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came* [literally, came into being] *by Jesus Christ.*"

John had said, in the foregoing verse, that *all* who have received grace at all, have received it, even grace for grace, from the fulness of the eternal Word, who became flesh. But now, he remembers those who have obtained mercy under the old covenant. Whence have *they* received grace? From the Law? No, never! They also have drawn out of the fulness of Jesus Christ, for whom they waited (Heb. xi. 39, 40). *For* it was

only the Law that was given by *Moses* ; he was no other than the servant of God, who could give nothing better than what he himself possessed, viz. the revelation of the holy Will of God, contained in the commandment : *Thou shalt !* Obedience to the Law he could not implant in the hearts of sinners, neither could he fulfil it himself in the sinner's stead ; therefore the law proved only a fiery witness *against* us, preaching, not grace, but condemnation (Deut. xxxiii. 2 ; Heb. xii. 29 ; Rom. iv. 15). It is true, that the Law, from which comes the knowledge of sin, had also some comfort for poor sinners, for it commanded them to offer *sacrifices*, as a propitiation for sins and as a thanksgiving to Him who forgives sins, and springing as it did out of the ground of God's saving works, (Ex. xx. 2,) by means of its numerous types, it wrought upon the salvation-craving heart of His people the ideas of the true abolisher of sin, and of the righteousness which He was to introduce ; yet all this was only a shadow of things to come and not the *very body*. (Col. ii. 17.) This body is in Jesus Christ : by Him *Grace has come*, which the Law, working wrath, only teaches men to feel the want of, but does not offer for their acceptance ; and by Him also, *Truth has come*, which the law, prophesying of future blessings, only indicates and shadows forth, but does not actually bring to pass or realize. With what holy care, however, does St. John weigh all his words ! He does not here, as before, use the word, *given*, but, *came*. Moses *was* not himself the Law, nor the author of it, neither was it contained in his person ; but he was the servant through whom God gave His Law. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, is not a servant, as Moses and all the Prophets were, through whom God could only have given grace and truth to men in the way of announcing their bestowment, but *He is Himself* the Grace and *He is Himself* the Truth ; the very substance of His announcement is contained in His person and His work. In Him has actually appeared in the world that which, based on Jehovah's own testimony of Himself, was the watchword of

Moses and the Prophets, viz, *Grace* and *Truth*, (Ex. xxxiv. 6 ; Psalm c. 5).

Jesus Christ! In that Name, which henceforward the evangelist gives to the incarnate Word,—in that Name *is* Grace and Truth ; (ver. 14). “He is made unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption.” “As if he should say : The law which was given by Moses, is, it is true, a law of life and righteousness, and of all manner of good ; but through Christ something more has been done : He comes and fills the vacant bag and the empty hand ; what the Law teaches us and requires of us, *that* He actually *brings* to us. Through Him we have another spirit from what we had before ; so that God’s word and law is pleasant to us, and with all my heart I feel it to be a happy thing that I am to trust God above all things, for I feel that I can do it, and I have made a beginning and already know my *A, B, C.* : through Him I take hearty pleasure in the first commandment, through the grace which Christ has given me, while I believe in Him.” (Luther).

Jesus Christ alone it is who brings to men the Grace of Life in communion with God, and it is He alone who brings Truth, which is the fair brightness of the holy God ; for He alone, as being the only begotten Son, is originally, and in Himself, full of Grace and Truth.

Ver. 18. “*No man hath seen God at any time ; the only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.*”

God indeed spoke with His servant Moses “face to face,” and allowed him to behold “His Similitude” (Numb. xii. 8);—but to contemplate God perfectly, *as He is*, was what even Moses could not do ; for when he addressed to God the prayer : “Shew me Thy Glory,” he received in answer : “Thou canst not see my *Face*, for *there shall no man see Me and live.*” (1 Tim. vi. 16).

A *Similitude* of the God, who, to the eyes of sinful men, is invisible, Moses and the saints of the old economy were graciously permitted to see, viz., the Similitude of Form of the

Son who was one day to take upon Him our Flesh ; He it was who revealed beforehand the glory of the Divine Being ; with a mild and softened lustre, such as sinners under the Law might be able to bear (Isa. vi. 1, etc). *No man hath seen God at any time*, except as we have seen, through Christ. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and all those upon whom at any time the glory of His countenance shone,—all derived such grace from the fulness of the only begotten Son, who thus speaks : All things are delivered unto me of my Father, and no man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither *knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*” “ *No man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book containing the counsels of God, neither to look thereon ; to the Lamb alone issuing the new song : ‘Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof.’*” Rev. v. The Father no man sees ; but the Son permits Himself to be seen under a veil in the old dispensation ; but in the new, without a veil and openly ; and he who sees the Son, sees the Father also. It is the only-begotten Son alone who, from eternity, has contemplated the Father, for *He is of the Father* : “*He is in the bosom of the Father.*” St. John remembers how he himself lay on Jesus’s bosom, and he can think of no more tender expression to describe that most intimate, ever-blessed communion of the only-begotten Son with the Father than this : “He is in the bosom of the Father ;” literally, *towards*, *i. e.*, *turned towards* the Father’s bosom. “It is said of those *who are to be born*, that they are in the *loins* of their father ; but those who are in his *bosom*, are born. The Son is in the Father’s bosom, because there never was a time in which He was not.” (Bengel). As he said above : “The Word was with (towards) God.” The only-begotten Son, even in His humiliation, was with God, with whom He was in the beginning, and He *is* in the Father’s bosom now that He has returned from whence He came. Luther beautifully interprets this,—he says : “John means to say, that it is from the only-begotten Son of God, who hangs on the Fa-

ther's neck and lies in His arms, that we have received it. By this he wishes to tell us, and fully to assure our hearts of the fact, that there is no room for doubt in the Word which has been revealed through the Son. For, says the apostle, the Son lies in His Father's bosom and in His arms, and is so near to Him, that He knows for certainty His Father's most secret counsels." Chrysostom says : " Observe the friendly kindness of the Lord ! He is pleased to allow us to speak of Him with our poor foolish words, only that we might be drawn to lift up our eyes on High, and with our little hearts to embrace His greatness." The only-begotten Son has *revealed* what He beholds in the Father's bosom. He Himself, the eternal Word, who became Flesh, is the living *exposition* of what God is, viz. *Love* (Eph. i. 9 ; 1 John iv. 18 ; chap. viii. 25). His words testify what He has seen and heard, and the words that He speaks are the revelation of His nature, full of that whereof they speak ; for in Him is present that which they declare : Grace and Truth.

He does not declare some glorious thing which is far off, as His forerunners the Prophets had done, but "*We saw His Glory*, the glory as *of the Only-Begotten of the Father*."—"The Only-Begotten of the Father,—*He* brings it ! The Son of God, whom God has within Him, and who Himself is God, He belongs Thereto. For He knows what is true, and He comes from the Father : there is no other doctor, master, or preacher, but the one Doctor, Christ, who is within the Godhead, in His arms ; the Father has Him, so to speak, seated in His arms and embracing Him ; He is in the very Being of God ; He descends to us from Heaven, and becomes man : Who would else have revealed it to us ? Therefore, through the only-begotten Son and through the Gospel, we learn to look God straight in the Face, and when this comes to pass, everything that belongs to man dies ; for a man must then confess that he is a sinner, and blind, and knows nothing, and must straightway appeal to Christ. He who has not Jesus Christ cannot be saved : be it called Moses, pope, cardinal, mass, purgatory, vigils, masses for the dead,

—it is all of it mere death, death, ay, and the Devil himself. For God has placed His glory wholly and solely in his Son ; out of Him we may fast and confess and watch ourselves to death, and yet never be able to get ease of conscience. Therefore John entices and draws us hither, that we may not for an instant lose sight of the mercy of God and of Christ, for on Him alone all depends. It is only in the Grace and Truth of the beloved Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, that there is Life, and it is He only who remains near to Him, that knows God as He is." (Luther). Yes, in the only-begotten Son, we obtain the promised blessing : The Lord lets His face shine upon us and is gracious unto us !

And now, dear brethren, once more lay firm hold on these precious words : "*The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father.*" Behold, what Love has the Father shown to us ! We also are now in His bosom, as His dear children, for the Son says it : "I in them, and Thou in Me ; Thou lovest them as Thou hast loved Me." Oh, would that thou couldst only believe !

The Witness of John.

CHAPTER I. 19-34.

Grant, O Lord, that the voice of Thy preacher in the wilderness may be blessed to our souls ! Oh, do Thou prepare a way for Thyself in our hearts, and there let Thy glory be revealed !

THE *eternal Word* has become *Flesh* ! This statement, the sweet kernel of his Gospel, St. John has laid down in the first eighteen verses. As we have meditated upon them, we have longed to see by faith, as he saw in bodily presence, the glory of the only-begotten Son, which He had in the beginning in His Father's bosom,—the glory, some rays of which, through all time, He has permitted to shine forth as the *Light of Life* to men, as the *Light of grace* to sinners,—the glory with which, in the fulness of time, He dwelt, full of grace and truth, in the tabernacle of our *Flesh*. These first 18 verses shine out as a golden inscription over the door, through which we now follow the holy John into his Gospel history. They form the prelude to that holy strain which, in varying notes, we shall hear again and again repeated throughout the Gospel. How the Lord reveals His Glory, how believing souls see His Glory, how unbelievers remain blind to His Glory (ver. 10-13) : this is the story which St. John has to tell in his Gospel, which, from beginning to end, might be called, "Glory's history." Already, before, immediately after he had comprised the sum of his own witness of the Lord of Glory, in the 14th verse, the Evangelist appealed to the witness given by John the Baptist, his own guide to the

Saviour. It is the testimony of the promised messenger, who was to go before the *Son of God*, and summon Israel to *believe* on Him. In grateful remembrance, he now dwells for a while on this testimony, for it had sown the first fruitful seed of truth in his own soul. He had taken to heart the voice of the preacher in the wilderness, and the Lamb of God found in him a poor sinner, all ready to be loved and saved. May the Lord grant that all who hear the voice of John the Baptist may become loving followers of John the Evangelist !

Ver. 19. "*This is the record of John, when the Jews sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him: Who art thou?*"

Long had Jerusalem delayed to concern itself about the preacher of repentance. A multitude of the people, indeed, and amongst them, some Pharisees, had hastened out to the banks of the Jordan to hear him preach ; many had been touched by the power of a voice, the like of which had not been heard since the time of Malachi ; and the question, "What shall we do?" ran like wild-fire, from mouth to mouth, amongst the crowds of sinners who assembled round him, and who sought in his baptism the forgiveness of their sins.

But "the Jews," *i.e.*, the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem, the heads of the people, who represented the Jews *as a nation*, had as yet been waiting to see how matters would turn out with the Baptist. Even his discourses, full of severe rebuke, in which he summoned the Pharisees and Sadducees to appear before the "wrath to come," had not roused the heads of the people to any official proceeding against the man clothed in camel's hair garments, whom yet they could not but hate, for they feared the people. But now a turning point had appeared in the course of John's public testimony, which alarmed the Sanhedrim, and aroused them from their assumed indifference : *Jesus had been baptised by John, and John had seen His Glory*. During the forty days that Jesus had been tempted in the desert, the voice of the preacher in the wilderness had been crying louder and more impressively than it had even done before : "This was He of whom I spake :

He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for He was before me" (ver. 15); and he had distinctly testified, just in so many words, "that This is the Son of God" (ver. 34). The same men, who afterwards took up stones to stone the Son of God (chap. x. 31), are now struck with dismay by the message, that the Son of God was come to His own (St. Matt. ii. 3); and they despatched a solemn deputation from the Temple-ministry—Priests and Levites—to the preacher of this unheard of doctrine, for the purpose of subjecting him to certain interrogatories? "*Who art thou?*" they ask him. It would not have displeased them if the son of their priest Zecharias, had given himself out for the *Christ* (St. Luke iii. 15); they would hardly have stoned *him*; perhaps they might have complied in some degree with his call to repentance, and have used his honoured name to aggrandise their own reputation with the people (Chap. v. 35).

"Thus we see here with what knavery they acted, and how they tempted John entirely to deny Christ, and to make himself a Judas Iscariot, and to justify all their wickedness, and to give them all the benefit of his honour and popularity. Are they not sly foxes, who thus offer honour to John in order that they may get to themselves all the benefit of it?—offer him an apple for a kingdom, and barter their counters for his florins? But he stood stedfast as a rock." (Luther).

Ver. 20. "*And he confessed and denied not, but confessed: I am not the Christ.*"

Whilst he denied *himself*, and bid away from him the honour which the Tempter would fain have offered him, he did *not* deny Christ. There lies, indeed, in the manner of his confession, "*Not I am the Christ* (ver. 20), a reference to the One standing among them who truly *is* Christ. So, if Satan question me respecting the ground of my good conscience, and would fain persuade me to rest upon my own self, and to be my own Christ, I confess and deny not, but confess: "I have not a righteousness of *my own*;" and when I do this, the devil sees well that he has

before him a poor sinner, who depends on a better righteousness than his own, namely, that of Christ, and finds he has failed. Oh, when a man only knows what he is *not*—that he is not his own Christ—then, to the joy of his heart, he will soon know what, in Christ, *he is*. May the Lord make precious in our eyes John's humility, and John's single-heartedness !

Ver. 21. "*And they asked him : What then ? Art thou Elias ? And he said I am not. Art thou that prophet ? And he answered, No.*"

The messengers do not ask, "If thou art not the Christ, who *is* the Christ, and where is He !" for it was from no longings after the Saviour that their questioning proceeds. They rather go on to tempt the Baptist. He had bid away from him the honour, which they had offered him, of being Christ ; yet he might not be indisposed to take to himself the honour of being Elias. They knew the promise in Malachi, chap. iv. 3 [or rather the letter of it], and they were expecting that Elijah the Tishbite, who had gone into heaven, would come again in his own person, as the forerunner of *that* Messiah whom their carnal mind was dreaming about. It appears that they were inclined to the superstition [which, according to St. Luke, ix. 9, 19, had crept in amongst the Jews], that the soul could pass out of one body into another,—which, in the case of Elijah, who had been taken up into heaven, was a doubly absurd idea. Now John was no more *their* *Elijah* than *their* *Christ*, and it was the first business of that faithful confessor to utter this *No* at once, in the most unequivocal manner possible. But, in the very act of declining for himself what would have made him honourable in their eyes, he was in reality faithful to the Spirit of Elijah, which really was working in him (St. Luke i. 17 ; St. Matt. xi. 10 ; xvii. 12). But for that Elijah who had appeared again in John, the Jews had surely no eyes—"they knew him not," says the Saviour (ver. 23), and his voice they despised.

Neither was John "*that Prophet*." The glorious prophecy of Christ, in Deut. xviii. 15, the comfort of which is set forth in Isaiah, from chap. xl. onwards, and of which we hear the dis-

tant echo still in 1 Maccabees xiv. 14, had been perverted by the Scribes, so that what men were then expecting was a mighty prophetic Moses who, in the face of the Romish Pharaoh, should open the road for the Messiah by the exercise of supernatural powers (Chap. vii. 40 ; St. Matt. xvi. 14 ; 2 Macc. ii. 1, &c. ; xv. 13, 14). Some thought that Jeremiah would again appear. Now John was, it is true, a Prophet, even the greatest of all the Prophets, but he was not *that* Prophet, neither in the sense contemplated by the Jews at that time, nor that intended by the Holy Ghost, who had given the promise in Deut. xviii., which has been fulfilled in Christ. This simple monosyllabic "No" of John's is explained by the holy zeal with which his heart strove after Christ, and the confession of His Name. It is as if he had said, Why do ye tarry so long with *me*? Let us to the main point. Let us come to *Him* who really is worth asking for!

Ver. 22, 23. "*Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to those that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.*"

If he is to speak *of himself* at all, he prefers doing it in the words in which the purport of his mission is briefly summed up in holy scripture. And these words contain at the same time the necessary supplement to those former ones of his, in which he had declined the honour which the Jews would fain have put upon him, of being the actual Elijah. For here he declares that he really is the *other* Elias,—that Elias who was promised. The prediction of the Prophet Isaiah, in chapter xi., had not yet been fulfilled in the time of the Prophet Malachi, or at any rate, to only a very scanty degree. The Glory of the Lord had not yet been revealed in its fulness, as it meant to reveal itself; and the reason was this: because the people had not prepared the way for the Lord by sincere and thorough repentance (Zech. i. 4). And, accordingly, while the people are murmuring against

their own sins, the Prophet Malachi loudly calls to their recollection the *preparing of the way of the Lord* which Isaiah had spoken of; he promises a final summing up of all the herald voices which had hitherto cried: Prepare ye the way of the Lord! in that one messenger of all messengers, that Elias, who should precede the revelation of the Glory of the Lord, and prepare, through the preaching of repentance, a people willing to receive the sinner's Saviour. "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness,*" therefore, is John. Like a true preacher, he loses himself entirely in the substance of his message, he is quite content to be only a *voice*,—to "lend his tongue" to the Lord, as Gregory of Nazianzen so happily expresses the vocation of a preacher; and every thing in him was *voice*.

In order to place before the eyes of the people the *waste desolation* of the *hearts* of men, he chose the wilderness of the Jordan as the place of his preaching, which might remind them—as also that passage in Isaiah—of that other wilderness, in which the disobedient people had had to wander forty years, before they were permitted to enter the promised land.

"John calls the times in which he lived, *a wilderness*; and, viewed in themselves, at any period, the times are so. As in a wilderness there is no sowing nor reaping; no springing, shooting, nor growing; no blossom nor fruit for the use of men; as no one dwells in the wilderness, but the traveller passes through it with hasty steps, and longs for the sight of cultivated ground,—as in the wilderness there is no tarrying, no comfort or satisfaction, ay, no "way" even along which one can walk with ease, but barrenness and desolation is every where to be seen: so, in like manner, every time, when viewed in itself is, in the eye of God and His saints, an unfruitful, inhospitable, unpleasant, impassable, forsaken waste. As the individual man, as he is by nature, is compared to a bad, unfruitful tree, or to a bramble-bush,—so with equal truth is each nation, ay, all mankind, called an unfruitful wilderness, in which the Lord can never find any fruit or satisfaction, and which, if left to itself, will remain unchanged." (Löhe).

“Prepare ye the way of the Lord!” cries the voice in the wilderness. How can that be done? The spiritual desert, the sinful children of men, must confess that they are a wilderness, and, without any obstinacy or defiance,—“every mountain shall be brought low,”—but at the same time without faint-heartedness,—for “every valley shall be exalted,”—they must wait for and trust in His help alone who, through His glorious grace, is able to transform the hard, dry wilderness into a fruitful garden. We sinners can no more *give ourselves* life and salvation than a wilderness can of itself produce fruitful trees; all that we can do,—and this, with the help of the Lord, we *can* do,—is, not to *hinder* this grace, but rather to clear away the obstacles which resist its advent into our heart. “*Repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand*” thus John himself interprets the words: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord!” (Matt. iii. 2). Comp. Jer. xxxi. 22. *Because* the fulness of Grace in Christ is laid open to be received without price, *therefore* the people is called upon, by sincere repentance, to get rid of every thing which would be calculated to stop and keep back the stream of salvation which is even now ready to shed over the wilderness its limpid purling waters. As water flows down hill into the deep-lying valley, but never flows up an ascent, so also must the water of Life find a spiritual declivity and fall, if it is to flow into the heart of man; and the more lowly we become, the higher will our gifts of grace rise.

“The *way of the Lord* is when He does every thing in us, and all our actions are not ours, but His; this state of things is to be brought to pass through faith. But the *preparation* is spiritual preparation, and consists in the deep thorough knowledge and confession that thou art, with all thy works, poor, damned, and miserable. The more a heart is thus minded, the better does it prepare the way of the Lord.” (Luther).

This voice of John’s was, to the deputation from the Jews, a perfectly insufferable voice, as the Evangelist indicates by his remark in verse 24 :

Ver. 24. "*And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.*"

The lofty-minded holiness of the Pharisees would not hear of the way being *made* ready for the Lord, for in their own eyes they had long ago made the way quite perfect; of repentance they stood in no need. The "voice" finds with them no response. They hasten to turn away the discourse from the unwelcome office of the "preacher in the wilderness," and ask:

Ver. 25. "*Why baptisest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that Prophet?*"

On the ground of Ezekiel's prophecy in chap. xxxvi. 25, etc., the Jews expected, and rightly, from the Messiah, or from His forerunner, a general purification, through some such "baptism for the remission of sins," as John was commissioned to proclaim. But the Pharisees, in the carnality of their minds, had given this promise a merely external character, imagining that they could enter their promised land, the glorious kingdom of their Messiah, through that second "Red Sea" (1 Cor. x. 2), without sincere repentance, and herewith converting the miracle of the new birth into a mere *magical* kind of transmutation. For this reason, they were incapable of perceiving that the prophesied preparation of the "way in the wilderness" was realised in John's baptism, or that the preacher of repentance was the real baptiser who had been promised; and they proceed, partly in crude ignorance, and partly in malicious cunning, to urge in objection, that his baptising, as he had hitherto been doing, was in contradiction with his present confession. But John, despising their threats as he despises their hypocrisy, abides steadfast, (for no reed shaken hither and thither with the wind was he,) and confesses Christ as he had before done.

Ver. 26. "*John answered them, saying: I baptise with water, but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not.*"

John was baptising with water, but yet it was not bare water with which he baptised, for *Christ* gave it the sanction of His own practice, and filled up the water-baptism of John with that which He alone could give,—with the comfort of the forgiveness

of sins in the promise of the Holy Spirit,—of that same Spirit which, in an extraordinary manner, was given to the apostles amidst the fires of Pentecost, and which, in an ordinary manner, is given to all Christians through the waters of baptism.

This Christ, who baptiseth with the Holy Ghost, “*standeth among you*,” John says, for he had already baptised Jesus, and, in the act of baptising Him had recognised Him as being the Christ ; and in the very fact that he knew Him and proclaimed Him as present, whilst the Jews knew Him *not*, there was given to them a token that John’s baptism was really *from Heaven* (Luke xx. 4), and John’s mission from God the Lord. To the question, therefore : “Why baptisest thou, if thou be not that Christ ?” John replies : “It is true that I myself am not Christ, but yet Christ exists, and not without Christ do I baptise. If you knew Him who stands in your midst, you would know me also ; and you would not despise the water with which I baptise, but would be glad to be baptised yourselves, if you knew Him who, through the Holy Spirit of promise, makes the water which my hand presents, to be a baptism effectual for the washing away of sins.

“Thus closely, by divine appointment, are knit together God’s works of Grace and the ministrations of the Gospel minister, for God’s ministers are God’s fellow-workmen. As opposed to Christ, ministers, it is true, are nothing but straw, stems, husks, and shells, whilst the Lord Jesus alone is the excellent grain of corn, the lovely almond-kernel of our souls, which, by their ministrations, through the word and sacrament, is presented before us. He, then, who wishes to possess this Grace of Heaven,—this precious ‘heart-kernel,’—such an one must not despise the insignificant shells and stalks in which the costly prize vouchsafes, in this lower world, to be brought round for men. But the preacher himself before Christ must humbly bow his head, and acknowledge before all the world, I am not Christ. (Herberger).

“*He standeth among you.*” What joyful words for all who

were waiting for the Consolation of Israel ! What blessed tidings for all Advent-hearts ! But there they stand, the self-satisfied Jews ; cold and unaffected, they hardly feel the words of rebuke, "*Whom ye know not.*" There is no desire in their hearts, there is no sigh on their lips, for the knowledge of this unknown One. What ! should not *they* of all persons know the Messiah if He really were there ? They, the Levites, the Priests, the Pharisees, the rulers of the people ? Was He to come among them in such an obscure disguise, He, the Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the nations was to be ? That is a notion which their proud reason cannot stomach. They have no fancy for a Christ whose honour does not come from them, and they listen with perfect indifference while John exclaims :

Ver. 27. "*He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoes' latchet I am not worthy to unloose.*"

He is present, *they* know Him not ; He is to appear *after* John. the Lord after His messenger ; and then many who also now know Him not, will recognise Him as one who in glory was *preferred before* John ; and, so far before him, that John deems himself unworthy to unloose the latchet of His shoes. It was the business of the servant to carry the shoes of his lord, and to unfasten the latchets when the shoes were to be taken off. Now Christ is not *a* lord but *the* Lord ; therefore a service proper enough to be offered by a servant to his earthly lord would be an unpardonable liberty and presumption if offered to *Him*. John, therefore, in his confession which is prompted by feelings of the deepest unworthiness when compared with Christ, testifies in effect the same as he does in the words which we have in verse 24, "*That this is the Son of God.*" "It is a sentiment of adoration, it is a bending of the knee, it is a rendering of honour and praise, that we witness on the part of John in these words, "*I am not worthy to unloose the latchet of His shoes.*" What he says, is perfect, thorough truthfulness ; it is the lowly but just perception of what is most righteously due. The fact is really so : Archangels and Angels, all souls of the blessed, and all the

saints upon earth, say exactly the same thing, and with equal truth. For who is worthy to perform even the slightest service for Him who was and is and is to come." (Löhe).

In his own heart, how well has John prepared the way of the Lord! "The meaning of this for us is, that with John we, too, should humble ourselves, and say: O Lord, here there comes a poor wretch, an old tattered, filthy rag—or, as St. Paul says, stinking "dung," if out of Christ one is to come before Thee in one's own natural self. In the sight of the world, and out of the range of Thy judgment, it may, indeed, seem musk, velvet, and gold; but before Thee, O Lord, let me be an old rag, or a foot-clout, that I may help to wipe the shoes of Thy Son; and bestow upon me His righteousness, for He, together with His righteousness, is my noblest and dearest treasure. For I know that through Him and His righteousness I enter the kingdom of heaven; whereas, through my own holiness, I must needs have gone into the bottomless pit." (Luther).

Ver. 28. "*These things were done in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.*"

The Evangelist was so deeply impressed by the solemn testimony of John before the deputation from the Sanhedrim, by which he so joyfully repeated and confirmed the record, which he had previously borne of Christ before the people (Matt. iii. 11; and the par. pas. in St. Mark and St. Luke), that the spot where such an event took place is still present before his eyes.—*Bethabara*, or, according to a better reading, *Bethany* (both signify a *ferry*), not, however, the Bethany near to Jerusalem, but another, which lay *beyond Jordan*. Even the *time* in which the events related in ver. 19 to chap. ii. 1 took place, is given by the Evangelist (ver. 39), and that, too, so exactly, that it is easy to trace how indelibly all this was engraven on his affectionate recollection.

Ver. 29. "*The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*"

From the wilderness, where He had been tempted of the devil, Jesus returned to John, who was still on the banks of the Jordan. He comes on the scene as a Conqueror, "ministered unto" by angels. The devil had tempted Him to forsake the lowly, unassuming path of Saviour, to throw off from His back the sin of the world, before He had, by suffering and blood, expiated its guilt and effected its atonement; but, in the spirit of perfect obedience to His Father, the Saviour had overcome the tempter—"I was not rebellious, neither turned away back" (Isa. iv. 5). And accordingly, when John saw Him coming towards him, not glittering with any such glory as Satan had required Him to assume, but, with lowly and willing meekness, bowed down under the burden which the Father had laid upon Him, the sight of this meekness and deep humility draws forth from the preacher of repentance the words of that truly evangelical cry: "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!*" How many paschal lambs had, indeed, to be slain, to keep up in the mind of the people a longing for that redemption, of which the deliverance out of Egypt was the type! How often had the poor sinners in Israel read these words in Isaiah's great chapter respecting the cross (liii.): "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: *He was led as a lamb to the slaughter.*" All the lambs whose blood had ever been poured out at the altar of the temple, morning and evening, had been unable to give to the troubled consciences anything like true repose—all the paschal lambs that ever were eaten yet failed to satisfy the hunger of the spirit; but now, with eyes enlightened by the Holy Ghost, John beholds *the* Lamb which *God Himself* had prepared (Heb. x. 5) and given to be a sin-offering, "the real genuine Lamb of God, Israel's Praise and Glory;" and all that Isaiah once prophesied of the vicarious sufferings of God's "righteous servant," all that John himself had heard from Jesus' own mouth, when he reverentially baptized Him for the fulfilment of all righteousness—all this, speaking at the place which had been hallowed by that baptism, he gathers together

in those words, so full of grace : "*Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth the sin of the world.*"

Let us consider, word for word, this testimony of John's. For all that faith has in Christ is comprised in this utterance ; it belongs, as C. H. Rieger says, to the "master-sketches of the Holy Ghost."

The Lamb of God *bears* the sin of the world ; *that* is His priestly work (Isa. liii. 12 ; Lev. x. 17). He who Himself knows no sin, takes sin in the body of *His* flesh, which is *our* flesh (Col. i. 22), and steps into our place, as if He had committed our sin, yea, committed the sin of the whole world (2 Cor. v. 21). The wages of our sin, which is death, is paid over to Him, and because the "chastisement" (Isa. liii. 5) was upon Him we have "peace ;" for insomuch as He carried our sin in His own body up to the sacrificial altar of the cross, and offered a sufficient sacrifice for it in His precious blood (1 Pet. ii. 24), He has made full atonement for us, and has carried our sin *away* out of God's sight, so that it can no longer condemn us or prevent our free access to the heart of God. But further, sin, *once for all*, removed out of God's remembrance as far as imputed to us, by the one sacrifice of Christ, is, moreover, *day by day*, taken away *from us* and mortified *in us*, through the power of that same blood, day by day applied by faith, as the blood of sprinkling, purifying the heart anew (1 John i. 7 ; iii. 5 ; Rev. vii. 14), until at length the sinful body has its end in death, and we shall become, in the kingdom of glory, perfectly *holy* through Christ *in us*, as we now are perfectly righteous through Christ *for us*.

In order that *every* sinner may view his *whole* guilt of sin lying on the back of this Lamb of God, John's voice cries : "*Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth the sin of the world.*" The guilt of the whole *world*, even of the heathen—whom Isaiah so many ages before beheld sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb (Isa. lii. 15)—does the Lamb of God bear, in order to make propitiation for it ; and He bears *the whole* of it, bears *all* sins—for the word is : *the* sin of the world, *i.e.*, all

that there is of sin in the sinful world, the whole sickness of the world into which sin has entered, and the whole wages of sin.

But it may be asked, Does the Church, in the celebration of the holy Supper, speak according to truth, when she lifts up the strain : "Christ, Thou Lamb of God, who bearest the sin of the world?" Is it so, that not only has Christ, the Lamb of God, *borne* the sin of the world in the days of the flesh of His humiliation, but that also He *bears* it still on the Throne of His Majesty? Yes, truly, He bears it eternally! It no longer oppresses Him, indeed; since the hour that He cried aloud: "It is finished!" no longer does it lie upon Him as a burden of anguish, now that the baptism of blood has been accomplished by which He atoned for it; but, as a trophy of his victory (Col. ii. 15), He bears it still in His pierced Hand. Thus, the risen Prince and the exalted King of Glory abides for ever the Lamb of God, and has an unchangeable Priesthood (Heb. vii. 24). The power of the propitiation, effected by His blood once shed, is an eternal power, for it is the power of the blood of the *Son of God*.

The blood which we drink in the Lord's Supper is the blood of the living Christ, of Him who has endured death and triumphed over it; and we partake of the food furnished by his glorified Life, in remembrance of that death of His, by which we are reconciled. Only let us reconcile ourselves with God through repentance and faith, and then the Lamb of God bears our sins and takes them away; not that He should die for us anew, but inasmuch as He applies and appropriates to us the merit of His eternal sacrifice, through the use of the Word and Sacraments (Heb. x. 14).

And although in our flesh sin dwells still, yet in those who, through faith, are in Christ, it is covered before God's tribunal by the Lamb, who is exalted at God's right hand, who is for us Surety and Intercessor (Rom. viii. 34). And, indeed, every lust of sin which I slay in my wicked heart, how should I be able to slay, except by laying hold in faith, on the slain Lamb, who lives to all eternity? It is overcome by the blood of the Lamb

(Rev. xii. 11), and we die daily in the same proportion as the Lamb, who takes away our sin, lives in us.

“This is a beautiful and glorious testimony which John bears to the prosperity and success of Christ’s new Government and Kingdom, and the words, in which he sets forth what we have in Christ, are plain, clear, and distinct—a powerful and mighty sentence! A Christian should stand by it in simple dependence and faith, and not let any body take him away from it. For there is none other comfort, either in heaven or in earth, through which we can withstand an assault of the enemy, than this; but most especially, in the extremity of death. This is the grand point, for that we know where our sins have been disposed of. For the law lays them on our conscience, thrusts them into our bosom; but God takes them away from us, and lays them upon the shoulders of the precious Lamb. For if they lay upon me and upon the world, then we are lost; for sin is too strong and mighty for us. And so God says: I know that thy sins are wholly too heavy for thee to bear, therefore, behold! I will lay them upon My Lamb, and take them away from you. And do thou believe this: for if thou dost, then thou art free from sin. There are only two places where sin can be—either it is with thee, to lie upon thy neck, or it lies on Christ, the Lamb of God. If it lies on thy shoulders, thou art lost; but if it rests on Christ, thou art quit of it, and art saved; so now hold on to whichever thou hast a mind.” (Luther).

If thou canst believe that these thine own sins are included in *the* sin which the Lamb of God bears, thou art saved. But to remain stedfast in that faith, that is the hardest point. John cries out in the hour of his enlightenment, with strong faith, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!”—but afterwards, in the dark hour of conflict, in his prison (Matt. xi. 2, &c.), he was offended at the quiet, unassuming course which the Saviour followed, and would have rather seen Him as a conquering Hero than as a suffering Lamb. John’s knowledge, indeed, of the Lamb of God was generally only a

budding, initial knowledge ; and that is quite true which some one has said, that “ a child who has taken hold of the contents of the Apostles’ Creed knows many glorious things which John as yet only saw in the twilight of the future and in the early dawn of prophecy.” But our knowledge, though brighter, and grown out of the germ, will never save us from conflict. May the Lord grant us grace, that when, in the dark hour, our view into the “ Lamb’s nature ” becomes obscured, we may, with John, be able to bring our “ Art Thou He, O Lord ? ” to Jesus’ own compassionate heart ! So shall we go forth out of every conflict with a fuller and more blissful shout : “ All praise be to the Lamb.”

The following verse stands in very close connexion with this witness to Christ as the Lamb of God :

Ver. 30. “ *This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me, for He was before me.* ”

Comp. chap. v. 15. The *Lamb* of God is the *Son* of God ; what perfect joy this assurance gives to the soul ! No one could be chosen by God to bear the sin of the world inferior to this “ Man,” whom John here refers to, who was before John, before the world, who was in the beginning, very God with God. It is not the blood of a man like you and me that has redeemed us, but the *precious* blood of Christ, the Son of God, for nothing less than the blood of such a sacrifice could be counted as a sufficient ransom to expiate the sin of the whole world. When John first gave his testimony to the Godhead of Christ, “ he knew Him not,” but now that by divine revelation he has seen His glory he confirms it : This—this Lamb, which bears the sin of the world—is He of whom I said, etc. Be not offended, because to-day I call Him the *Lamb* of God. He is so, and the reason why He is the Lamb of *God*, the real, atoning Lamb, is because He is at the same time “ *the Man who was before me.* ”

Ver. 31. “ *And I knew him not, but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.* ”

Into the very midst of His own had come He whom they

knew not! John himself knew Him not; at least he calls *that* knowing *no* knowing, no real knowledge, which he may possibly have had of the Son of Mary before the revelation of the Lord's glory at His baptism. God had so ordered it, that the certainty of his witness of Christ as the Son of God should be founded on a revelation coming immediately down from heaven. In no other way did John come to Christ, except as drawn by the Father, (chap. v. 44,) and truly it was by a powerful and glorious drawing. "It is as if he had said, *Even I* knew Him not. Why urge against me the lowliness of His condition, on which account, according to your ideas, He cannot be Christ? I myself did not immediately recognise Him as Christ, for the garb of the cross wrapped Him round, and He was hidden to my reason not less than to yours; but since the time that the Spirit revealed Him to me, I know Him, and as long as I live I will confess Him, and neither the authority nor the threat of any man shall ever separate me from my testimony to Him."—(Brenz.)

In order that Christ, who was concealed in the poverty of our flesh, *should be manifest to Israel*—for this end came John with the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; the purpose of this baptism being to put the people into the posture of eager longing for the Lamb of God (Acts xix. 4); while also it was in the very act of performing this his office of baptizing, that the Baptist received the Divine certainty that this Jesus was the Christ.

Ver. 32. "*And John bare record, saying: I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.*"

Thus the Baptist bears record, thereby justifying the reference that he had made to "this Man," "this Lamb," for in the descent of the dove upon Jesus (ver. 29, 30), John receives the sign which God had promised him in that "word of the Lord" which came to him at his call to his ministry. (Luke iii. 2.)

Ver. 33. "*And I knew him not, but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt*

see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."

The Holy Ghost descended upon Jesus in the visible form of a dove, to betoken the fulfilment in Him of the word of prophecy (Isaiah xi. 2), and continued to *rest* upon Him in the same way as the same Spirit *moved* upon the waters on the morning of the creation, "hovered" or "brooded," as the word is in the original. after the manner of a dove, who spreads her wings over her young to impart to them vitality and warmth.

In order that John's eyes might *behold* Him, the Holy Spirit not only compared Himself to a dove, but also assumed the form of a dove, in conformity with other instances of acted imagery which we have in the Scriptures.

But was it, then, *only* for the baptizer that the Spirit meant this "coming and resting," and not also for the Baptized? Doubtless it was for Jesus also. His coming upon Jesus was not an empty coming; it was not merely intended for the Baptist's eyes, but it was a coming full of grace and truth, intended likewise for that dwelling amongst us of the Spirit of God, which in the person of Jesus has been brought to pass.

The Saviour *received* the Holy Ghost in His baptism, and indeed it is to this baptismal gift of the Spirit that the Apostle refers, when, after saying "God manifest in the *flesh*," he continues, "justified in the Spirit" (1 Tim. iii. 16).

But *had* He not, then, the Spirit from all eternity as the eternal Word, and had He not also the Spirit as the incarnate Word conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of the blessed Virgin? He did possess it indeed *for Himself* in the eternity of the God-head; but He would fain have it in a twofold way, *for Himself* and also *for us*, as the Spirit of *Life* and as the Spirit of *office*. in the same way that He possesses righteousness and happiness by a twofold right,—by right of birth and by right of acquisition. *For us* He received the Holy Ghost when *for us* He was baptized; as the Head of His Church He has received it for the blessing of His members. "Christ had no need of baptism for

Himself, but baptism needed the strength of Christ. For it was to be to us the well-spring and substance of all blessings, in order that all who are baptized might be counted worthy to receive the Holy Ghost. (Chrysostom.)

The treasure with which Christ's baptism was endowed is now deposited in *our* baptism ; the holy Ghost really hovers over it, rests also upon us when we are baptized ; the heavens are opened over our baptism, and the voice of the Father in the Word proclaims us His true children for the sake of His beloved, only-begotten Son. Yes, He who was *born* the Son of God, receives the Holy Ghost as the Lamb who bears the sin of the world, that same Holy Ghost of whom redeemed sinners are *born again* to be God's children ; He who for our sakes was anointed with the Holy Ghost at His baptism, the same is He "*who baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.*" In this does John rejoice. Because the heavenly Lamb of God received John's baptism in Jordan, therefore is John's baptism filled with that blessing which it promises to bestow : forgiveness of sins, and life in a righteousness which will avail before God, Christ the Son and the Lamb of God has really brought, and this He makes to be ours through the Holy Ghost, which, because it was shed upon Him, therefore also is richly shed upon us in the bath of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Titus iii. 5-7.)

Ver. 34. "*And I saw, and bare record that this is the Lamb of God.*"

I have testified and will continue to testify, John says, that this Jesus, upon whom I have seen the Spirit descending and resting upon Him, is the Man before whom I am sent as His messenger, and to reveal whom I am sent baptizing with water, namely, the *Son of God*.

In this name, which he had heard coming down when the Heavens were opened, John at length sums up his witness. (Matt. iii. 17). He who was "preferred before him" in dignity, who was mightier than he, whose shoes latchet he was not worthy to unloose ; who existed "before him," and now is

the Lamb of God which bears the sin of the world; who baptizes with the Holy Ghost—all this is briefly comprehended in this one title, "*the Son of God*"—"the only-begotten of the Father" (ver. 14), whose "Glory" the apostle John tells us he had beheld, and because he had seen it, was able to give his testimony that He was the Son of God,—a record which most emphatically was true. (Chap. xix. 35.)

Observe how conspicuous is John's feeling of joy and thankfulness for having at length received that certainty concerning Jesus Christ which he had so much longed for! Before, we cannot mistake a certain tone of sorrowfulness in the words which he gives utterance to, "*And I knew Him not,*"—but now it sounds like a note of thanksgiving and praise when he exclaims: "*I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God.*"

May the Holy Ghost vouchsafe to give the like blessed certainty to all Christians, but especially to all who minister in the word! How sad it is when a preacher, or, to take another case, the father of a family, who, by his word and conversation ought to confess Jesus and to make Him manifest, is obliged to confess: "I know Him not—know Him not yet personally; He has not yet been truly manifest to my heart!"

But if only it is a heartfelt grief to a man that he has cause thus to complain, such an one may have the consolation, that the Father is willing to draw him to the Son, and to reveal to him what a poor sinner possesses in this Jesus. There is now no longer any need of a dove's form and of a voice from Heaven; we have the blessed word of God and the comfortable Sacraments. If with hungry souls we hear the word, and in simplicity make use of the sacraments, then will God give us the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus in us, as the Son of God and as the Lamb of God who bears *our* sins. Take refuge then in thy baptism, the grace of which is a certain grace, and pray without fainting until with the eye of faith thou art able through the doors of thy baptism to gaze into the opening Heavens, and hear the Spirit witnessing to thy spirit that thou art a child of God. Further, in the

Holy Supper refresh thy membership in the Body of Christ, after thou hast in careful confession laid thy every sin on the Lamb of God, that so thou mayest hear His voice, bidding thee go in peace, and assuring thee that thy sins are forgiven. And finally, give thyself up to the power of the divine word, and be fain to lay thy soul on the lap of that eternal Love which, in this word, comes very near and reveals itself unto thee. Yes, may the Lord grant us the hearing ear, that as disciples we may hear the voice of the holy "Three," who, as interpreters of the heavenly witnesses, "bear witness upon earth" (1 John v. 8) to the reality of our salvation; then shall we ourselves become witnesses of what we really know, as John was, and we shall be able to proclaim with joy: We have seen it, and will testify to our latest breath, *that This is the Son of God*. Then, with the apostle John, who never could forget these words of his earliest teacher, we shall be able to say from our own blessed experience: "We have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John iv. 14).

Come and See !

CHAPTER I. 35-51.

Lord Jesus, Thou dost call us ; grant that we may hear Thy Voice and follow Thee. Amen.

Two golden days in John the Baptist's witness life has the evangelist given an account of in the foregoing section ; in what we are now to consider, he relates the events of the two other days which followed upon those former two, days, in which he met with *that* in his own experience, which he ever after treasured up in devout remembrance. We have already learnt to perceive the grateful love which guides the pen of the Apostle, whenever he has occasion to mention anything which, in his hearing, had fallen from the lips of his Master, the holy Baptist, concerning the Glory of the Son of God. How he felt towards this first testifier to the love of Him on whom his own highest affections centred, is conspicuously shown by what follows. It was John the Baptist's repeated cry, as he testified: "*Behold the Lamb of God !*" that led him to the Saviour, and it was through this that he saw His glory. Even yet, in eternity, when they shall both stand before the throne of the Lamb, will the one John, with grateful lips, be repeating to the other that he has been the helper of his joy.

Ver. 35, 36. "*Again the next day after, John stood, and two of his disciples ; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God !*"

The Baptist is standing in the same hallowed spot on the

banks of the Jordan, in which he yesterday received the visit of the Lord Jesus. Two of his disciples, who were musing in their hearts on the scene of yesterday, are standing by him, and are listening while he speaks to them of the Saviour, with the hope of whose coming he had been comforting them since the day of their baptism, and who had now really appeared. *He sees Jesus walking.* Not as yesterday coming to him, but *passing by.* Silently He walks on. We do not hear Him ; only the voice of His messenger is heard. The friend of the Bridegroom is suing for the bride and is leading her to Him ; but when the Bridegroom *has* the bride, then he who has obtained her for his Friend is silent, and rejoices greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice (chap. iii. 29).

“Also observe, that just as the bride does not sue the bridegroom in marriage, but the bridegroom the bride, even though the bridegroom were a king's son, and the bride a low-born maiden ; so, in like manner, human nature does not mount upwards towards Heaven, but God Himself stoops down to her, however lowly she may be, and however full of disgrace.” (Chrysostom).

But what are the words in which the friend who is suing for the bride clothes his proposals ? “*Behold the Lamb of God !*” With what words could he allure the poor sinners who had been bruised by his own exhortations to repentance, if not with these ? O yes ; we can very well see that it could have been nothing but the gospel of the *Lamb of God*, which gathered the first two souls to the marriage-church of the New Testament ! Nothing else could have drawn them.

Ver. 37. “*And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*”

The two disciples rightly understood John's “Behold !” to imply the exhortation : “Go forward to Him !” It was the Father drawing to the Son, and without “conferring with flesh and blood” they obeyed and went. There were *two* of them : what joy that it was not one alone ! Even on this, the first

day of their following Jesus, they were to enjoy the sweetness of mutual fellowship ; and thus the Lord afterwards sent His disciples forth upon their mission "*two and two*" (Luke x. 1). The Evangelist tells us the name of one of the disciples in verse 40 ; it was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. Concerning the name of the other, he is silent. Yet we know him well,—this disciple who, with the heart of a bride, conceals, as it were under a maidenly veil, the secret of his personal love, and who is so fond of keeping back his own name ; we recognise him again as the "disciple whom Jesus loved," "the other disciple."

On the part of John the Evangelist, we can trace clear indications that the voice : "*Behold the Lamb of God!*" which called him to Jesus, never ceased to vibrate in his heart during the whole of his life. Christ, as the Lamb of God, fills him through and through, and has taken entire possession of his soul. In his gospel, chapter xix. 36, he discerns in the crucified One the true Paschal Lamb ; and in his Revelation, his enraptured eye rests from beginning to end on the Lamb whom he recognised by the marks of his slaughter—the "Lamb as it had been slain." "They follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth,"—that is the virgin-like virtue which was exhibited to the disciple in those "redeemed" ones who were the "first-fruits" of God and the Lamb (Rev. xiv. 4).

The Church is upheld, and at all times gathered in, by that same Word which at the beginning gathered in her first-fruits. May the trumpet of the sacred ministry always give forth the same clear sound : "*Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth the sin of the world.*" and may this sound of the Gospel always reach the hearts of those who, in John the Baptist's school of repentance, have learnt to hunger and thirst after righteousness! Amen.

Ver. 38. "*Then Jesus turned and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master) Where dwellest thou?*"

Jesus *turned round*, He did not continue to “walk.” Just as He stands still to look up at Zaccheus who longed for Him (Luke xix. 5); for His love perceives every seeking heart, and is willing to be found. The affability of the Saviour shows itself here in a beautiful and striking manner. The two disciples are dumb from shyness and timidity ; so the Lord Himself begins the conversation by asking, “*What seek ye ?*” That they sought Him, He saw well enough ; but they must confess *what* it was that they sought in Him. What are we seeking in Jesus Christ ? Thereupon hinges the point whether we are to realise a blessed finding or not.* “We generally seek what we have lost, or else what appears useful or desirable to us : but what, for fourteen centuries past, had been more desired and longed for to so many glorious names,—patriarchs, judges, kings, prophets, all the saints, in short, of the Old Testament,—than this Lamb of God, who, by the voice of the holy John standing on the mountains which sever the Old from the New Testament, is now testified to be present ?” (Calov).

What *seek* ye ? The daughter of Sion answers when she sings, “By night on my bed, I sought Him whom my soul loveth ; I sought Him, but I found Him not” (Cant. iii. 1). To the nights of seeking and not finding there now succeeded for Israel the saving day of finding, the joyful, blessed, grace-bringing time of the appearing of the Messiah.

And what did Andrew and John answer ? What were they seeking ? “*Rabbi*,” they call Him ; He shall be their Lord and Master, they will be His disciples and servants,—“*Where dwellest Thou ?*” In retired tête-à-tête converse they would fain open their hearts to Him and confess what they want with Him ; His dwelling is to become their confessional, He Himself the Refuge of their souls.

Ver. 39. “*He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day ; for [Greek : and] it was about the tenth hour.*”

* Compare the heart-searching question addressed to those who, in Jesus of Nazareth, were leading to slaughter the Lamb of God (chap. xviii. 4).

This they had hardly expected, that the Lord would immediately take them home with Him ! They would have been happy if only He had appointed them to come to Him on the morrow, or the day after. But he who, like them, seeks Jesus, must not be kept away a single minute. "*Come and see !*" "*Come and see the works of God !*" (Psa. lxvi. 5). The disciples, in their timidity, had only inquired for the *dwelling* of the Lord, but under this question was hidden the whole longing of their hearts for *peace* in the Messiah ; and, therefore, in the Lord's answer, they heard more than a mere invitation to His dwelling ; they heard the invitation of the meek and lowly One who bids the heavy laden come to Him that He may refresh them, and that they may find rest for their souls (Matt. xi. 28, 29).

And when they *came and saw*, they not only saw *where* He *dwelt*, but also how blessed a thing it is to dwell with the "Messias" (ver. 41). To them it was assigned, in this early hour of the wedding-day of the New Testament, to gaze into the heart of the Bridegroom : "*Come, O ye daughters of Sion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith His mother (the church of the Old Covenant) crowned Him in the day of His espousals and in the day of the gladness of His heart*" (Cant. iii. 11). They themselves belonged to this crown, prepared for Him by the service of John the Baptist.

"*What seek ye ?*" was the first word ; "*Come and see,*" was the second, which John heard from the mouth of Jesus. The latter, in particular, was indelibly imprinted on his mind. Philip certainly received it from him (ver. 46) ; and also in the Revelation it again resounds, when John is invited to behold the seals opened by the Lamb (Rev. vi. 1).

They abode with Him that day, from the early morning until the tenth hour ; that is, until two hours before sunset. Where they went, when towards evening they left Jesus' dwelling, we are told in the following verse.

"What a blessed day did they spend with Him ! Who will tell us what they heard from the Lord during that time ? Well,

let us then prepare a dwelling in our hearts, where Christ may enter and hold converse with us." (Augustine).

I know a dwelling in which my Saviour abides ; it is His holy Church, the city of God (Psa. xlv. 6). "*Where dwellest Thou ?*" I asked Him with burning heart ; and He answered, "*Come and see.*" I went and saw where He dwelt, and now all my life long I will sing : "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts ; he shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy House, even of Thy holy Temple."

Come and see ! Do not continue to stand afar off ye who now enquire after the Lord and His dwelling ! We would gladly compel you to come in : Oh ! I pray you, come and see ! An hour will come, when an inexpressible joy will possess the children of Zion, when they shall hear the words, "*Come to Me ! Come and see !*" from the lips of the glorious and the terrible One, and shall enter into the gate of the heavenly city, and remain with Him, not for hours and days, but for ever and ever. See we to it, that we do not fall short of entering into the rest where God will abide, in the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness !

Ver. 40, 41. "*One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ, [or the anointed]. And he brought him to Jesus.*"

This happened on the same day in which the disciples had been guests in Jesus' dwelling. They could not bear to remain *alone* in their happiness. What Löhe so beautifully expresses in the commencement of his three books on the Church : "I could not endure now to be *saved alone*," was the feeling here shown by these first-fruits of the New Testament Church. They could not go to rest until, at least, Andrew's brother, Simon, had become sharer in their joy ; for they knew that he also had prepared the way for the Lamb of God, and that he longed earnestly for that Gospel balm, with the hope of which the Baptist

had cheered all the hearts which his cry to repentance had wounded. Both of them go forth to seek him by the Jordan. Andrew first finds him, "his *own* brother," the Evangelist says, remembering, no doubt, *his* brother-german, James, towards whom his heart, full of deep thoughts about Jesus, at once turned, prompting him to seek him, and whom also, as we have reason to believe, he soon found for the Saviour ; for, when John was afterwards called from his occupation of fishing to which he had returned, to the apostleship, his brother was also prepared to obey the same call (Matt. iv. 21). "*We have found the Messiah!*"—John and I, we have found Him, the Messiah whom we, and thou, Simon, with us, have sought in our prayers ; the one precious Pearl in the field of promise we have found, the Consolation, to the expectation for which we were baptised, the Peace and the Joy of Israel ? "*And he brought him to Jesus,*"—in the evening of the very same day ; and Simon, no doubt, was willing ; he let himself be brought in haste, perhaps running even faster than Andrew. Jesus was, however, still awake, and was waiting to receive the spoil which man's first love to the Saviour took and brought to Him. "Having received a pound, they immediately give it back to the Lord with usury." (Cyril).

Does not a secret longing come over us for these affectionate feelings shown in this morning-hour of the New Testament,—an hour which so strikingly displays such precious gold ? The pure gold of brotherly love,—how brilliant its lustre ! Here is mission-life in all the vigour of youth, and here is angel's joy over the heavenly secret of Christian fellowship !

In this early chapter of missionary history, we see also the blessing which, from one connected *relative*, extends onwards to another. "Thou and thy house" (Acts xvi. 31),—thus, from the very beginning, the story ran.

Ver. 42. "*And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas ; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, being interpreted, [Peter,] A stone.*"

Jesus looked at him ;—He looked at him with those eyes

which pierce men's hearts through and through (chap. ii. 25), and, prophesying the transfiguration of Simon's natural boldness into the gift which grace should impart, of holy steadfastness, He gives him—in receiving him into His family—the new name of *Peter, A rock*. By the attribute of the Messiah, which was just then shining so brightly around him, was guaranteed to the astonished Simon the fulfilment of that promise which his name imported: He who knew him before Andrew called him, and who now says to him: “*Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas,*” He will not lie to him, but will make out of Simon the right man for the name of *Peter*, to the praise of His grace. When, three years after this, Simon Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. xvi. 16), Simon had then, by an experimental growth in his character, realised a title to this new name given by Grace to its own new creature, and Christ says to him, “Thou ART Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.” (Comp. Commentary on St. Luke ix. 20, vol. i., page 360.)

“We have in Peter a beautiful image of the Church. For see how Christ deals with the disciple whom He called Peter, Rock. Now with friendliness He admonishes him, now with sternness he upbraids him, ay, even calls him Satan. Ere long, Peter gives himself up wholly to Christ, then he denies Him, but turns to him again; yet even after Pentecost he stumbles again, and exposes himself to rebuke, as we read in Gal. ii. Thus is it with every individual believer, and thus too with the whole Church of God.” (Brenz.)

Ver. 43, 44. “*The day following Jesus would go forth [comp. Luke ii. 51] into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.*”

Accompanied by the first-fruits of the lost sheep of the house of Israel, who had found their way back to him, the Shepherd, Jesus leaves the banks of the Jordan, in order to return into Galilee, to the duties of His shepherd's office; for in miserable

Galilee it was that "the great Light" was especially to shine. Where the need is greatest, there help is nearest.—(Isa. viii. 23, f.; comp. Matt. iv. 12.)

By the way, He finds another poor sheep, who knows His voice when He calls him. *Philip of Bethsaida* (Fish-house) was indeed not only of the same *town* as Andrew and Peter, but they also belonged to the same *school*—viz., the school of repentance. With them he has borne sorrow, and now, with them he is comforted. It must have been an exceedingly precious moment when the three friends found themselves together with Jesus; Philip must have immediately exclaimed, "Praised be God that *they* are also here!"

It is said of Andrew and John that *they* had found the Messiah, but of Philip it is said, that the Messiah found *him*. It is a mutual seeking and finding between Jesus and the soul. Yet it is Jesus who first begins the seeking. Before Andrew and John went to seek Him, He had sought them through the Baptist's voice; Philip was found *by* Him, but yet he was able likewise to confess, "*We* have found Him!" (ver. 45), for his soul was seeking Him who sought and found him.

Observe in what various ways the Saviour goes after the souls of men, even in these first days of His Shepherd's work, and how He draws them to Himself out of pure goodness! Observe, also, how each disciple, when found, becomes immediately a seeking preacher!

Ver. 46. "*Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*"

Those were blessed days of finding! With them, in fact, after thousands of years of seeking, the gracious day of finding begins to dawn. The Evangelist's heart is entirely filled by the recollection of how the firstlings of the flock were thus privileged to find; five times in these verses does he use the same beautiful expression.

Philip findeth Nathanael.—Nathanael,* indeed, together with Philip, was likewise taken whilst journeying from Jordan to Galilee, on his way home, for he was a Galilean, from the town of Cana (chap. xxi. 1). It appears, that he had sat himself down to rest by the way under a fig-tree (ver. 48). Thither Philip now hastened back, begging Jesus and the three brothers to wait a little while; and as if continuing a discourse in which he had before been deeply engaged with Nathanael, he joyfully exclaims to him: “*Yes; we—Andrew and Peter and John and I—have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write; He is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*”

This, at least, is plainly to be gathered from Philip’s words, that Nathanael belonged to the little band of those who were waiting for redemption, and were preparing the way for the approaching Saviour.

That the prophets have written of Him, is clear; but did Moses also *in the Law*? Yes, as the Lord Himself says (chap. v. 46; Luke xxiv. 27). Not only did Moses hand down the account of the promise made to the patriarchs, and even promise *the Prophet* who should fulfil what he could only commence, and, as it were, shadow forth, viz., the redemption of the people; but the Law itself is a prophecy of Christ, requiring to be fulfilled.

For what the law promised to all who keep it, *that*, Christ alone, the only Fulfiller of the law, can venture to lay claim to, and this justification of life His substitutional obedience makes over to sinners (Rom. v. 18); and what the law threatens to all who transgress it, *that*, Christ alone, the true and sacrificial Lamb, can bear and endure, and so His vicarious sufferings procure for sinners redemption from the curse of the law (Gal. iii

* Bartholomew, the son of Talmai (Tholomy, Ptolomy), is most probably another name for this very Nathanael (in Greek, Theodon = God’s gift); in which case, it would be five future apostles whom the Lord gathered on these two days. It surely is not by accident that Bartholomew is coupled with Philip in the list of the apostles.

13). Because Moses in the Law wrote of Christ, since the knowledge of sin which is by the law convinces sinners that they have need of a Saviour (Rom. iii. 20), therefore the Prophets, (Gal. iii. 24,) the interpreters of the Law, comforted the weary and heavily laden people with the news that, in the counsels of the merciful God, there was already *existing* a Saviour. John the Baptist, in his office, unites both—the voice of the reproving and chastening Law and the voice of the comforting Prophets; and it is disciples of John that we have here before us. At that time, it must be granted, they had as yet very unworthy thoughts concerning the Messias of whom Moses and the Prophets did write. It would have satisfied them, if Jesus had been, what He was then considered to be, *the Son of Joseph*. Philip's words: "*Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*," is perhaps a reminiscence of what the Baptist had said: "*And I knew Him not!*" to these Galilean youth, the son of Joseph of Nazareth is perhaps not an entire stranger, and Philip's words express their joyful surprise, that in this very carpenter's son they had found the Messias.

If David, the son of Jesse, the shepherd boy, had risen to be king over Israel, why might not "the Son of Joseph" run a like glorious career? Thus they thought.

For a long time after, it was hidden from them that Christ, *through suffering*, must enter into His glory, and that not figuratively, not in an image—as they would be disposed to interpret it—but really, as God's sacrificial Lamb, it behoved Him to bear the sin of the world, and so accomplish the redemption of sinners.

But the Lord throws a gracious veil over their weakness, and beholds only their sincere desire for salvation and their heart without guile (ver. 47).

How comfortable to all timid, simple souls, is the condescension and kindness with which the Saviour, amidst this company of Galilean fishermen, discloses His Glory!

Ver. 46. "*And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good*

thing come out of Nazareth ? Philip saith unto him, Come and see !"

Out of *Nazareth* ? Not out of *Bethlehem* ? That it is which surprises Nathanael, so well versed in the Scriptures as he is. Besides, he is himself a Galilean, and knows how despised the whole of his native country was in Israel, mixed up as it was with heathen life and customs (chap. vii. 52), so despised, that it was a common saying, "The Galilean is a block !" Should the King of Israel arise out of "Galilee of the Gentiles ?" And further yet : Was it the paltry, obscure town of Nazareth that was the home of the King of Israel ? Should the fountain of all blessing flow over the land from *Nazareth* ?

Might not Philip himself have given an answer to this question out of the prophets who wrote of Christ ? Did not Isaiah's words occur to his recollection, respecting the Man "despised and rejected of men," and "lightly esteemed," who had no form nor comeliness ? Did he not remember "the root out of a dry ground," or the "Rod out of the stem of Jesse ?" Did he not remember the prophecy, that the Messiah should bring to honour despised Galilee ? (Isa. ix. 1). [Luther's rendering of this verse is perhaps more in conformity with the Hebrew than we have it in the English version : "As the former time lightly esteemed the land of Zabulon and the land of Naphtali, so shall the latter time know it."] Was it, are we to suppose, very surprising to Philip, that Christ should not be born in *Bethlehem*, as Micah prophesies—for the fulfilment of this prophecy also in Jesus of Nazareth was, indeed, as yet unknown to him ? Be this as it may, certain it is, that Philip's answer is nearer the mark than if he had taken one from the prophets, viz., *that* answer which he took from the mouth of Jesus himself : "*Come and see !*" In happy tranquillity, he leaves all Nathanael's doubts to be solved by the Lord, whom he himself, and his brethren, by "coming and seeing," had found.

What an overwhelming power of Grace and Truth must have been displayed in the whole Being of the Saviour ! How the

mild lustre of His hidden Glory must have shone forth in all His words, if Philip had only to say, "*Come!*" and to be quite sure that if Philip were only to come, he also would *see*, would penetrate through the servant-form of the Nazarene into the Glory of the Messiah! Comp. chap. vii. 46; Luke iv. 22: xi. 27.

Jesus laid aside the form of a servant in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathæa, and is seated in glorious majesty on the throne of His Kingdom; but His Church on earth bears the Nazarene veil after Him, and as often as a fresh revelation of her inward glory beams forth into the world, that she may spread herself as a "goodly cedar tree," so often is the saying fulfilled anew: "He shall grow up before Him *as a tender plant*, as a root out of a *dry ground*." Wherever there is a "Galilee of the Gentiles," there the "great light" arises. And then again arises the contradiction: "Can there any good thing come out of *Nazareth?*" If, however, they who ask are not self-satisfied, proud, false Pharisees, but Nathanael-like souls, then we can confidently answer, "Come and see!" They who *come* will *see*; for in the midst of His poor members *He* is ever present, who never refuses to any *sincere* comer the witness of most heartfelt experience, that here is really Immanuel, and joy and peace in His name.

Be still, thou Nazareth Church, be quite still! So long as thou bearest the Ark of Testimony in holy hands, and allowest the spring of the pure word and sacrament to be thy jewel and comfort, thy professors will never return empty; if with Philip they go forth to seek companions in Jesus, they will find their Nathanael, and Nathanael will come and see, and, in oneness of faith with thee, will worship thy King, the King of Israel!

"*Come and see!*" Would that I could bring the voice of these words home to those souls which long to be sure of their own eternal salvation! Behold, thou hast with Nathanael long searched the Scriptures, but thou hast not yet found, hast not yet called *thine*, *Him* to whom they throughout bear testimony, *Jesus* of Nazareth, the Son of God, and the Lamb of God, thy

Redeemer through His precious blood : then cast thyself down before Him, pray earnestly that He would open thine eyes and reveal to thee the Scriptures, and be not satisfied with thus *coming*, until thou dost *see* Him !

Ver. 47. “ *Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile !*”

This is one of those words which our blessed Lord spoke when He “rejoiced in spirit” (Luke x. 21). They were not many hours of joy which He had in the days of His flesh, but such an hour was this when He looked into Nathanael’s heart ; such was that, when the Canaanitish woman and the centurion of Capernaum drew from Him words of glad surprise ; such, again, was that, when Mary Magdalene wept at His feet, and when Zaccheus opened his house to Him for a consecrating feast ; when the—you surely know them well, those rescued sinners, down to the thief on the cross, whom the Father permitted to flow as little drops of joy into the bitter cup of suffering which the Son had to drink ;—yes, truly such hours as these were to Jesus real hours of joy ; and even now, whilst encompassed by the surrounding praises of many thousands of angels, He yet finds His greatest delight in those poor sinners who prepare for Him the joy of seeing their eternal salvation. With a glance of her eyes the daughter of Zion “ravishes the heart” of her heavenly King and Bridegroom (Cant. iv. 9).

O Lord, can it be that I who am dust and ashes, who am sinful and abominable, that even I *can* cause Thee joy ? Oh, forgive me my twofold guilt, and do Thou become my joy, then shall I also become Thine ! Amen.

An *Israelite indeed*, in whom is no guile, is what the Lord calls Nathanael. “They are not all *Israelites* who are *of* Israel” (Rom. ix. 6), but Nathanael was *indeed* an Israelite ; what an Israelite in the sight of God and His anointed should be, that he *was* : a sinner humbled by the law, who was hoping for the Promise of the blessed seed of Abraham ; a genuine son of the patriarch *Israel*, who, even in his last hour exclaimed : “I have waited for Thy salvation. O Lord” (Gen. xlix. 18).

Without guile: he was not like those hypocritical honourers of the Messiah, the Pharisees; he desired to see the Saviour as the Saviour of his soul; he had in good earnest prepared the way for the Lord, and he would fain not leave a single bar of sin before the door of his heart at which Jesus was now knocking; for he experienced the truth of those words of the Psalmist: "Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not sin, and *in whose spirit there is no guile.*" Nathanael was thus of that chosen number, who "do the *truth* and come to the *Light*" (chap. iii. 21); and, accordingly, the beatitude was to be literally fulfilled in him: "Blessed are the *pure in heart*, for they shall see God."

Were not, then, Andrew and Peter and John, to whom the Lord introduced Nathanael in these words, were not they likewise true Israelites, without guile? Certainly they were, for souls which are not honest in intention never do find Christ. But yet, when I thus see them together, these five disciples, and hear these words of the Saviour's respecting Nathanael in particular: "*Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*" I cannot but say that these words applied in an especial manner to *Nathanael*, above the other disciples. The beautiful gift of grace, *simplicity*, found in his heart a peculiarly susceptible soil, so that the sight of him was to Him who is the especial Lover of the simple-hearted, in the highest degree refreshing. Natures, in fact, differ. It is true that from the one Adam we all inherit *one* sinful, dark nature, in which dwelleth *no good thing* (Rom. vii. 18), nor, in particular, any such simplicity as would be pleasing in the eyes of God and His saints; but yet again there is a constant variety in those hearts which are the lights kindled up by the one Light that enlightens all; in each one there is reflected a different ray of grace, though emanating out of His oneness; and each one exhibits a bright and lovely lustre peculiar to itself. Now, in Nathanael, grace had heightened and transfigured into heavenly simplicity what, according to nature,

might have been called "simple" or "foolish." Let me not be misunderstood. There is a *grace* of simplicity which is refused to none who ask for it, the simplicity which is in Christ—a fundamental quality of a Paul (2 Cor. xi. 3), and indeed, in general, of every true Christian; but there is also a simplicity which is an *especial gift* of grace, with which the Lord adorns Nathanael-souls, whose reproach in the eyes of the world is, that they are "only poor, simple people."

Let us all strive after that indispensable grace of simplicity, after a heart without guile; and, on the other hand, if any one possesses the precious *special gift* of simplicity, let him be abundantly thankful, and bring it into lively operation, to the glory of God and the edification of the Church. And if thou thyself dost not know that thou hast it, yet give others the opportunity of recognising it in thee, and of refreshing themselves in the contemplation of it.

The Lord had praised Nathanael, and Nathanael had heard it; but, behold, how wholly simple-hearted he is! There is neither false humility nor pride in what he says:—

Ver. 48. "*Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me?*"

True it is that I am what Thou sayest; but whence knowest Thou me? Whence dost Thou know that I seek with my whole heart and without guile that which is the one desire of all the true Israel, peace in Christ, the King of Israel?

"*Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree* (under the fig-tree, Nathanael, the true Israelite, was in the right place: the fig-tree shadowed forth the fruits of faith and of love which Israel should bring to the Messiah), *I saw thee.*"

"I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. xxxi. 3). Before Philip was led by his brotherly love to go to call Nathanael, Nathanael was surrounded by God's omnipresent and all-observing Love, which treasured up every sigh of his lips, yea, even

the silent petition of his heart, which he himself hardly understood. What was passing in Nathanael's soul under the fig-tree was a secret between him and *God* alone. Of course, we know that before *God's* all-seeing eye Nathanael's soul lay well open, and that *God's* listening ear heard all, while the "Israelite indeed" was confessing his sins, and praying for peace in that Redeemer whom he so ardently desired. But here Jesus says, "*I saw thee!*" We may easily imagine what Philip would say after this: "O Nathanael, thou seest now who the Nazarene is!" (Luther.) "Lord, thou hast searched me out and known me!" the Psalmist says; and they are words which might well have now a loud response in Nathanael's heart.

Ver. 49. "*Nathanael answered and said unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel!*"

Whatever is contained in the name of *Christ*, that Nathanael confesses to be true of this Jesus, whose omniscient Godhead (engaged when and where His love dictated and the Father showed Him) had lightened his darkness and heard his prayer; and, amazed at the discovery, he bursts forth into a glorious confession of Christ's power and office. This *Joseph's* Son, of Nazareth, he calls the *Son of God*; yes, the *Son of God*, the *King of Israel*, as he had known Him in Moses and the Prophets, he discovers in this Jesus of Nazareth. He now no longer thinks Nazareth too mean to be the abode of the *Son of God*. Jesus saw *him* in that solitary hour of prayer, and now *he* sees Jesus, and sees him with the opened eye of the spirit, as the *Son of God*, whom the Father has set as his *King* on His holy hill of Zion (Psa. ii. 6, 7). True, the servant's garb which this King wore, afterwards concealed again His eternal Godhead even from the eyes of Nathanael, and that clear insight into the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father, which in this first hour of audience was vouchsafed to him, was yet in manifold ways obscured and diminished; but nevertheless, out of that first impression of His Messiahship once received, there sprang a growing development of all saving knowledge; out of that one

whole, unfolded itself each particular part. One thing ever remained to him, the King of Israel was his King; the "Israelite indeed" was, without guile, the property of this King; and three years after, when Jesus had risen, and when Thomas was reaching forth his finger and thrusting it into the scars of His wounds with the adoring exclamation: "My Lord and my God!"—surely Nathanael's soul knelt by the side of Thomas, and repeated afresh the confession of his first-love: "Verily, *Thou art* the Son of God. *Thou art* the King of Israel!"

Oh, that Nathanael's fig-tree stood near every house, and that all praying souls might in consequence gain true refreshment in those words of the Lord speaking to them after each occasion of such gracious audience, "when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee!" Oh, that in all congregations in particular, the Saturday evenings were passed under Nathanael's fig-tree, so that under the preaching of the divine Word on the Sunday, very many might have to ask, "Whence knowest Thou me?" and to thank the Son of God who listens to whatever rises upwards out of the closet of retirement.

Yet even these refreshments we enjoy upon earth only as a foretaste. In heaven, by the perfect knowledge which we shall then by sight attain to of the faithfulness of our King, whose ear did not miss *one* single sigh breathed forth to Him during the whole of our life, a fountain of joy will be opened to us such as we never before explored.

Grace Nathanael had now already found with the Son of God, the King of Israel; *grace for grace* out of His fulness is promised to him for the future.

Ver. 50, 51. "*Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.*"

Nathanael had seen a ray out of the fulness of heavenly light

which dwells in Christ, and he was enlightened to believe—yes, *believing*, the Lord calls it, for even a weak, beginning faith is yet a real faith. But the Lord also knows how much Nathanael's faith—and not less that of the other first disciples—needed strengthening; and this He promises to their receiving hearts. They should see, He says, *greater* things than they saw yesterday and to-day. Heaven was opened for these disciples from the moment that they had found in Jesus the Messiah, and powers from the invisible world were streaming down upon them. "Hereafter," from that hour, during the whole time that they followed Jesus, they should walk under the opened heaven, for the revelation of *His* glory who came from heaven, and likewise is in heaven, was to lighten around them in an uninterrupted succession of heavenly demonstrations of its reality. This Jesus tells them with His twofold *Amen*. He is, indeed, Himself the "Amen," (Rev. iii. 14;) the faithful One, and what He says surely comes to pass. Where the Prophets say, "Thus saith the Lord," there Jesus says instead, "Verily, verily, *I* say unto you."

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

From the time that the *Spirit* of God descended upon Jesus from the opened heaven, (chap. i. 32,) the spirits of God, who stood at the command of the Anointed One, displayed themselves, busy in their blissful service. Now earth had become a real *Bethel*—the house of God, the gate of Heaven!

The Son of Man had Daniel once seen as the Lord of Glory, (Dan. vii. 13,) coming with the clouds of heaven; *now*, this Son of Man was really dwelling and walking upon earth in our flesh, as the promised Seed in which all nations of the earth should be blessed, as the second Adam who was come from heaven, the Head of that highly blessed mankind whose curse He was to bear; and that which the patriarch Jacob (the predecessor of Nathanael, the "Israelite indeed") saw in his dream,

when the covenant of that promise was confirmed to him, (Gen. xxviii. 12), is now fulfilled in real glory in the person of Him who is Israel's Crown, in whom Israel attained its highest aim, (Isa. xlix. 3); for the angels of God are seen ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. The place which Jacob occupied when he lay with his head pillowed on a stone, is now taken by *Jesus*, who is also the *Lord*, He who at Bethel was standing at the top of the ladder. Now is God's house really upon earth !

The angels of God have their abode where the Son of God dwells as the Son of Man *among us*; for, mark ! they *ascend* first, then *descend*. Fellowship between the pure holy angels and us sinners, appears again restored through the incarnation of Him whom the angels serve (Col. i. 20; Eph. i. 10); and the road is opened to us by which we may move homeward towards heaven, led by the multitude of many thousands of angels, to behold, together with the "ancients" of the King of Zion, that Glory before which the sun and moon are confounded and grow pale, (Isa. xxiv. 23).

How beautifully *Luther* explains Jacob's ladder, following out the declaration now before us ! He says : "But what kind of ascent or descent is it ? Answer : It is just the mystery that in one and the same person there is both God and man. That is the great and unspeakable glory of the human race, which no tongue can express, viz., that through this wonderful union God has allied human nature with Himself. Hereby we, through faith, are taken up, and become one flesh with Christ, (chap. xvii. 21,) and thus ascend in Him ; but again, on the other hand, while He teaches and exercises us in His knowledge, He descends to us through the word and holy sacraments." Into this mystery the angels desire to look, and with joy encamp round about us, meeting us in nearer converse than ever they met Jacob (Gen. xxxii. 1).

Dost thou say, "But I see them not ?" I answer with Elijah, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see" (2 Kings

vi. 17). So, also, the disciples did not see with the eyes of their worthless body the ascent and descent of the angels of God upon the Son of Man—for it was only in silent concealment that the angels held converse with their Lord during the time of his flesh (St. Matt. iv. 11; St. Luke xxii. 43)—it was with spiritual eyes that they saw them, with the eyes of that faith which, as Luther says, “sees so keenly, that it penetrates through the clouds and through heaven, even into the heart of our Lord God. That power of sight may the Lord impart to us!”

The more firmly the growing faith of the disciples casts her anchor behind the veil which conceals eternity, the more deeply they feel certain of the truth of their Lord's promise; and as already now, in the gracious words and wondrous works of the self-humbled Son of Man, the presence of seraphim of heaven's air was fanning breezes around them, so afterwards, when they were filled with the Holy Ghost, they saw with new eyes heaven opened (Acts vi. 58), as the abode of the exalted Son of Man, and beheld the angels of God, who, in the Church above, with the elders surround the throne of the Lamb, (Rev. v. 11.) ascending and descending upon the holy Church, which is *His body*, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. How plainly, in the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, do we trace the fact that the angels of God, which excel in strength, stand round about the bed of the heavenly Solomon and his bride (Cant. iii. 7)!

“When Christ became man and entered upon His ministry, heaven was thrown open, and open it still remains; for, since the hour of Christ's baptism in Jordan, when it was first disclosed, to this present time, it has never been shut, and shut it never will be, although with our bodily eyes we do not see it. Before the coming of Christ heaven was fast closed, and the devil reigned triumphant; but through Christ and in Christ heaven has been again unbarred, and Christians can *see* heaven again now open, and they can hear God their heavenly Father continually talking with them, and the blessed angels are, with-

out ceasing, ascending and descending to us. If thou comest to baptism, or receivest the Lord's Supper, or gainest absolution, then the door of heaven stands open, and we hear the voice of our heavenly Father ; for these works all come from out of heaven, and through them heaven is open above us.

“The meaning is this, that the true Christian Church is through faith one body with Christ, and that she is His bride, and He her Bridegroom and Head, while however she is His “peculiar possession,” and that it is the Bridegroom's will that the bride should share and participate through faith in all His wealth, such as eternal righteousness, holiness and happiness. Therefore He has Himself adorned and attired her with heavenly wisdom and strength, that she may be before God glorious and great. Where, then, the Christian Church is, and the pure word of God is preached, and the Sacraments are administered with faithful diligence out of the word of God, while the word is also heard and received with believing hearts, and the articles of our Christian faith are followed in their unadulterated purity—there it is that heaven stands wide open, and is no longer closed. There is the true city and the true Jerusalem, since we are fellow-citizens with angels, and occupants of the same house and estates with those who dwell in heaven and have in heaven their business and employ. The Angels gaze down upon us, and we in return look up to them. Christ in effect says to us : Ye are now heavenly citizens, and have your citizenship above, in the heavenly Jerusalem, and ye are in the fellowship of the blessed Angels who without ceasing ascend and descend upon you.

“Now is heaven and earth become one, and it is just the same as if you dwelt up yonder, and the holy Angels were ministering to you ; for ye are one body with your Lord, they wait on you, they converse with you and you with them, and of one and the same sort is their word and discourse and yours. They sing to our Lord God : *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, (Glory to God in the Highest ;) and this ye also sing, telling that ye are come

to great mercies, that ye are become children of God, and heirs and joint-heirs with His beloved Son, and participants of the Holy Ghost, and of every blessing. Truly, this means not heaven to be shut, but both door and lock done away, and all standing continually open.

“We are certain that the blessed Angels are round about us, and see to it that no harm happens to us, nay, that not a single hair gets crumpled, except with His will who sits above, and who sends up and down the blessed Angels, to carry up our prayers to Heaven, and bring back to us the message that our prayers are heard.

“If Angels did not protect us, and did not *mount up and down* upon the *body of Christ*, that is, upon *us*, and remain with us, our adversaries would long ago have swallowed us up alive. There the Angels are then, and they keep off those blood hounds who plot it so carefully in the courts of Cardinals and Bishops. who else, I trow, had not been lacking in counsel and wisdom and device and power and craft and all sorts of intriguing, enough, at one time or another, to have extinguished us, root and branch. But it stands written that the Angels are there; therefore by God’s grace we still live, despite their rage who hate and loathe us like death. For we have with us the blessed Angels, who descend from Heaven and again ascend thither, and who take care of us, and watch over us.” (Luther.)

I know another way, and a delightful way it is, too, in which the word of the Lord with regard to *seeing heaven open* is fulfilled. I will describe it in the words of a letter of consolation written by a friend to certain afflicted parents who had buried a beloved child. “It seems to me, when any one member of a family has died a happy death, that in an especial sense heaven is opened, and those words in an especial sense fulfilled, ‘*Hereafter ye shall see heaven open.*’ But heaven is not opened without letting the glory of the Lord shine through. When the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds, the glory of the Lord shone round about them. Now, that your blessed L——

now more than an angel, is gone to heaven, the Lord will be pleased to grant you also a more perfect view of His glory than you had before. Which are the songs in the hymn-book that are the most joyful and bright? Are they not those relating to death and burial? Did not the glory of the Lord appear to the sweet singers of old in the brightest manner of all at the death-beds and graves of those whose souls were going to Paradise? It is no mere word, but a reality, that whenever the door of heaven opens to receive a departing saint, there takes place also a new beaming forth of God's glory down upon this poor, dark earth of ours."

Thus then were brought together the first fruits of the holy Church, and, from henceforth, one Christ-seeking "Israelite indeed" after another came and saw the glory of the Word made flesh, a glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

This seeking, and this coming and seeing still goes on, and will last on until the very last sinner, whose repentance has been foreseen by God, bows the knee in adoration before the King of Israel. When all are come and assembled, who, through the light which the word of life holds forth, and through the grace of the holy Sacraments, are led through the open door into the kingdom of heaven, and saved unto eternal life, then in a new sense will heaven be opened, and the holy city, the new Jerusalem, will come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. xxi. 2), and the Son of Man, attended by all the holy angels, will then come in His glory to dwell among us, full of grace and truth, in the new heaven and upon the new earth. Then the final fulfilment of the promise: "*Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man,*" will be sung and celebrated by the saints in hymns of praise for everlasting, world without end.

The Marriage in Cana.

CHAPTER II. 1-11.

*Refresh us, O Lord Jesus, Thou who art the Condescension of God,
with the mild lustre of Thy glory, that we may believe in
Thee. Amen.*

HEAVEN was now open upon the Son of Man and His brethren. The heaven-ward ladder, on which the angels of God ascend and descend, stood, for all those who had Nathanael's eyes, for ever fixed. This day, being three days after Nathanael's wedding-day, the heavenly ladder is set in the house of the wedding-feast at Cana. It stood, indeed, also at the beginning, in Paradise, when the eternal Word first instituted holy matrimony. But after that sin has in such manifold ways perverted even this divine ordinance, and in so many thousand houses had saddened the holy angels, the guests of pious married people, and had struck down the heavenly ladder, the Saviour now comes to a marriage, attended by the blessed angels, in order to adorn the married state with the revelation of His glory.

Our fathers have held the heavenly ladder at Cana, placed there for the profit and honour of holy matrimony, especially dear. *Spangenberg*, in his "Marriage Mirror," says, that the Lord Jesus Christ meant to show at the beginning of His ministry that He is the Saviour of matrimony; he says: "The very first and oldest state, which His Father had Himself provided in Paradise, but which since then has been so woefully perverted by the devil's lies and butchery, He would now fain *again restore*;

He now interests Himself therein, and honours it, as all true-hearted souls should do; and with good reason, since everything depends on this state, and the other two states, the office of preaching and magistracy, must needs proceed from it.

Because, then, the marriage state is the first, so the Lord Jesus Christ's very first miracle was performed in its honour. And this let us note, my dear friends, that Christ's very first miracle was wrought in the service of matrimony. Is not this a great comfort and a heartfelt joy for married people to hear? Who would not from his heart feel kindly towards the marriage state, since God showed to it so much and such great honour, and places on its head such a beautiful golden crown, as to work thereat His first miracle?

Ver. 1, 2. *"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and both Jesus was called and His disciples to the marriage."*

Cana, distant some three hours from Nazareth, was Nathanael's native town. There must have been quite a little band of "Israelites indeed" living at Cana, who were friends and acquaintances of Mary, the mother of Jesus, (perhaps even there were among them relations of the "Holy Family,") and who could on the present occasion venture to invite even Jesus and His disciples to the marriage. And Jesus came with His disciples.

Let us somewhat more closely consider this noble wedding Guest. Our blessed Lord is Himself called the Bridegroom and the eternal Husband of His bride, the Church. This is a view which runs through the whole of Scripture. So highly has God honoured the marriage state, that His word teaches us to recognize it as a reflection of that "great mystery," the union between Christ and His Church, and therefore that Christ is shadowed forth in every husband, the Church, by Him beloved, in every wife, the covenant between Christ and His Church in the marriage covenant, and the real union in the Sacrament between the Head and the members in the real union between man and wife, ("twain, one flesh.")

It has been asked, though the mere question jars upon a Christian's feelings, why Christ did not acknowledge the marriage state by contracting Himself an earthly and temporal marriage? But we may answer, it was not Christ's purpose, in His incarnation, to become one flesh with *one* individual of the human race, but with all mankind ; and His children were to be born to Him, not as to the first Adam in the way of natural birth, but in the way of regeneration ; the old race of sinners were to become *renewed* into a holy people of God, which is cherished and nourished by Him, not in a natural, but in a sacramental manner.

Because, then, it was not fitting that He should Himself enter into the marriage state, He was pleased in lieu thereof to show it the greatest honour which could befall it, by gracing a wedding—thereby marriage in general—with the blessing conferred by His presence. No one shall find in the Lord's unmarried life a pretext for despising or undervaluing the marriage state ; and therefore He makes His appearance at the marriage in Cana, and shelters holy wedlock under the shadow which His gracious acknowledgment of it afforded to it.

Dear brethren, let our hearts take firm hold of this picture, so full of comfort and salutary instruction : *Jesus, a wedding guest*. It is true God has delivered our Church from the fearful darkness under which *followers of doctrines of devils forbid to marry* (1 Tim. iv. 1-3), in order that they may wring out of a will-worship a merit before God, even in cases where God has *not* given the gift, granted to some, of a contented, peaceful, happy celibacy (Matt. xix. 12 ; 1 Cor. vii. 7) ; but, nevertheless, in this our time, our great foe makes war upon marriage from another side, and it is not without reason that the apostle, in that passage in which he speaks of seducing spirits and doctrines of devils as maligners of marriage, points attention to the *latter times*. In the old Pomeranian church-guide [Kirchenagende], the devil is called a savage foe of marriage, who aims at driving marriage out of the world, thinking that then there would be nothing

left but “a herd of beasts and incarnate devils ; thus all the beautiful divine order in our temporal condition, in high spheres and low, great and small, which, through God’s unspeakable wisdom, are wedded together as members of one body, must perish, and a fiendish savage state ensue, where there will be crime, violence, murder, destruction, shame, robbery, and all manner of wickedness without number and without end.” And *that* those diabolical spirits know well who are now seducing our poor people, and therefore, they are already beginning in divers ways to trample down the discipline of the married state, and to tear asunder God’s holy bond.

What must and will follow on this state of things, God has of old revealed to us. When flesh broke loose from the restraint of the Holy Ghost in marriage, then the flood burst forth upon the world (Gen. vi. 2, 3). But the Lord has still granted a *respite* to our nation. Oh, that during this respite, many may enter with Noah into the ark !

Once more, before we proceed with the narrative, we will just address a question of conscience to married people. Was the Lord Jesus present also at *your* marriage ? Yes, He certainly was there, for He is never absent from *any* wedding. But *how* was He there ? *invited, or uninvited ?* Alas, at how many weddings is He an unbidden guest ! He is fed with just a few crumbs of lifeless lip-service, and the marriage is kept in such a manner that His disciples cannot endure to be there, and He Himself is prevented from revealing His Glory. Yet He *will* reveal it, if not invited to bless, then uninvited to curse,—where not as the Saviour of marriage, as its Judge and avenger.

Ye parents, who once kept a Christless marriage, but who have now in your wedded state, both husband and wife (two-fold mercy !) returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls *and of your wedded state*, oh, thank Him for this patience and forbearance by inviting Him to your children’s marriage as the most indispensable of all guests, and neglect nothing that can help them to a marriage after God’s heart. And may also our youth themselves choose Jesus for their bridal Guide !

Whenever a wedding is celebrated among the people of Jesus, may His near presence, so rich in blessing, be the most longed for bridal present ; His wassail-cup, the sweetest delight ; the revelation of His Glory, the most precious ornament !

Let us now contemplate the revelation of His Glory at this marriage in Cana.

Ver. 3. "*And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.*"

Here the question arises, on what did Mary ground her confidence in making this request for miraculous help, this being, as we see, the first miracle which Jesus wrought ? (ver. 11). Oh, how long might Mary have been looking out for this first miracle and sign of her Son ! What ? Mary, who had praised the Lord God on account of this child, because in spirit she saw in Him the daybreak of Israel's help ; she, the first-fruits in the communion of believers, who kept and pondered in her heart the words of the shepherds, who had heard Simeon's prophecy, who had admitted deep into her heart the first words which are related to us as falling from Jesus' lips, although their meaning was not fully imparted to her, and who now, in the light of all these prophecies and announcements, observed the holy tranquil demeanour of her Son, as He became strong in spirit and full of wisdom ; she who, at this very time, was noting how He was stepping forth before the people from the retirement of His parents' house, whose exulting heart was stirred with dim anticipations of what was to ensue by the glory manifested at His baptism, and surely also by His words, " Hereafter ye shall see Heaven open ;" as she remembered also the angel who had announced to her the birth of her Son, the Son of God—is it possible that this Mary could have been other than expecting *the revelation of His Glory* ? Strange indeed if it had been so !

Yet, it may be perhaps asked, was it not somewhat unseemly of Mary to expect that the Lord should work a miracle upon such a common-place occasion as that of the wedding-wine falling short ? No, again, not so. For if it became the Lord to

perform the miracle, then Mary also met the views of her Divine Son, when she confidentially turned to Him with words which were in effect an implied request, "*They have no wine!*" Another question is whether Mary petitioned *in the right spirit*.

Ver. 4. "*Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.*"

Mary, then, had not asked in the right spirit; the posture of her heart rather *impeded* the Lord in the manifestation of His Glory. The right spirit would have been to have continued mindful that the wonder-working power of the Lord, even when it reveals itself in condescending benevolence and unassuming love, yet has ever for its one aim and object the manifestation of His Glory; and it was her place, in quietness and resignation of her own will, to wait for this manifestation, and not in carnal impatience to be eagerly snatching after it. Be it so, that she lost sight of the Divine object of the Lord's miracles in her regard to the human object for which she claimed their operation; be it so, that with impatient haste, almost with a tone of reproof, that Jesus should yet delay (comp. chap. vii. 3, 4), and in a momentary fit of maternal vanity, she would fain have hastened that very manifestation of her Son's Glory, for which she had been so long waiting; she received, however, from the Lord, who knew the feelings of her heart, a severe rebuke in the words: "*Woman, what have I to do with thee?*" The name of *woman* instead of *Mother*, marking as it does a distance between them, is designed to indicate to her, that with regard to His works as Christ, she does not stand to Jesus as a mother to a son, but as a woman to a man of God. "He said as it were: *That in Me which works miracles, thou hast not given birth to.*" (Augustine.) Mary savoured not the things which be of God, but the things which be of men (Matt. xvi. 2).

It was not between Mary and her Son, but between God and His Son, that it was to be determined whether or no, and when, the Lord should reveal His Glory. In the concerns of His heavenly calling earthly maternity was to hold its peace. "The

Omniscient Spirit of God saw from the very first what a mistaken worship the children of men would render to the holy mother of God, therefore He took care that in the written word there should be found abundant evidence, not only of the superiority of Jesus over His mother, but also of her sinful weakness and imperfection. He loves that we should pray for one another, and He is willing to hear such petitions, but to the prayers and intercessions of no man will He allow even the *appearance* which might make others believe that help followed through that man's merits, or for his sake" (Löhe). The worst service of all has been rendered to Mary by the last Romish dogma, which strikes her out of the number of sinners, of whom Jesus Christ is the Saviour. She alone, then, would *not* join in the song of the redeemed ; and in her "Magnificat," the word would not be, "*My* Saviour." Whilst to the real Mary He says, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" the Romish Mary says to Him, "Jesus, what have I to do with Thee?" As the Lord was the highest pattern to all children of filial obedience, so also He consecrated with His foot-prints the path described in Deut. xxxiii. 9, "Who said unto His father and to his mother, I have not seen him ; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children, for they have observed Thy word and kept Thy covenant." Comp. Matt. xii. 48 ; Luke xiv. 26. "For although there is no greater power on earth than that of a father and mother, yet it ceases when God's word and work begins ; for in Divine matters, neither father nor mother, much less the Bishop or any man whatever, but God's word alone, must teach us and guide us." (Luther).

Therefore the Lord rejects Mary's application. "Mine hour is not yet come," He says. Comp. Eccles. iii. 11. "The *time appointed* by the Father for manifesting forth My Glory by a miracle is not yet come" (Ver. 11). Neither *would* it have come at all, if there had not taken place in Mary's heart something which made it come, by reason of which help burst in like an overflowing stream. For what does Mary do ?

Ver. 5. "*His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*"

A marvellously beautiful speech this is of Mary's. She bowed with entire submission to the Lord's reproof; with profound humility she resigns herself to the arrangement, that the Son of her womb should tread a path to glory, in which she can never counsel Him, but only follow; she is resolved no more to meddle with Jesus' actions either by word or deed; she will remain quiet and will let Him alone. But, at the same time, she has descried something in the Lord's answer on which her faith lays hold; she believes that the hour which was *not yet* come might perhaps come very shortly,—and she believes so confidently that it *will* come, that she at once hastens to put the servants in readiness for the Lord. "Mary catches at the little unobtrusive word, *not yet*, and with great penetration infers from it, then it *will* come!" (Herberger). But when the Lord saw her faith, then His hour was really come! The faith of the humbled Mary is the precious link connecting the denial and the fulfilment of her petitions. Her perverse self-willed frame of mind stayed the Lord in the manifestation of His Glory; her submission and her trust in His goodness have a mighty power to hasten its approach. Mary and the Canaanitish woman form a pair; here as there, is the Lord's humbling, purifying refusal; here also as there, we see resigned submission to the faith which does not know, but only trusts, as Luther says,—"*to which is meant mere yea, when meets the ear mere no,*"—and which, as it were, catches the Lord in His own words; here as there is the Lord's yielding, the Lord's *resigning Himself to be vanquished*, while He allows violence to be put on Him by the faith of His disciple.

"Faith here stands in true conflict; see how His mother does, and what she here teaches us. However hard His words sound, however unkind the position which He takes, yet she does not interpret any of it as referrible to anger, or as contrary to His goodness, but remains stedfast in the belief that He is good, not

letting this persuasion be taken from her by His rebuff, so as to think Him even in her secret heart as other than kind and gracious.

“Dost thou not think it a very thrust of hell, when to a man in his distress, especially in the deep troubles of conscience, there comes such a rebuff, so that he feels as if God were saying to him, *What have I to do with thee?* Despond and despair must such an one, if he does not know God’s way in such dealings, and if he is not practised in faith, and does as he feels. Therefore is this part of the gospel the most important and deeply to be considered, that we must give God the honour of being good and gracious, although He appears and speaks as if He were otherwise, and although all our thoughts and all our *feelings* might be disposed to dream differently. For therewith is feeling killed, and the old man perishes, in order that pure faith in God’s goodness may remain in us and not more *feeling*. For here thou seest how the mother maintains an unshaken faith, and holds it forth as a pattern to us. Certain is she that He will be gracious, however much she does not feel it. Certain also is it that she feels differently from what she believes. Therefore she leaves the ground clear for His goodness to do and order as it will, appointing Him neither time nor place, neither manner nor measure, neither person nor name, letting Him do it as it pleases Him.” (Luther).

“*Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.*” This is also for us the way in which we are to see God’s glory. Let it be left to Him *what* He will do and *when* He will do it; if *we* only do *what He tells us*, the end will ever be glorious. If we have before us any word of Jesus, let us joyfully go forward and do it, how strange soever it may appear to us; in His Name, and at His command, it is our duty to venture all.

It is a pleasing feature, that the servants obey the Lord Jesus simply and without hesitation, although not knowing as yet what He exactly intends to do.

Ver. 6, 7. “*And there were set there six waterpots of stone.*

after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim."

Who ever imagined that these waterpots were destined for any higher service than for the washings of the Jews before and after eating? (Mark vii. 3, 4). Look round now on the course of thy life, and see whether thou dost not find here and there a copy of these pitchers! For instance, in married life, in housekeeping, the Lord loves to select things with which we had meant something quite different, often something quite idle, to serve as vessels wherein to convey to us His kindness and love.

Up to the brim did the servants fill the six pitchers—*six*, thus there was one a-piece for Jesus and His five disciples as a bridal gift to the wedding party, and each contained, according to our measure, about 150 or 200 bottles. Truly, it is a rich present that Jesus gives!

Ver. 8. "*And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast!** And they bare it."

With the words "*Draw out now*," the Lord accomplishes the miracle of turning the water into wine, and into such excellent wine, that the governor of the feast had hardly ever tasted the like. What was created at the word of the Lord was wine. The Lord's silent, unspoken thought, the gentle volition of His heart, was understood by the water, and honoured with prompt obedience. There, on the lake, the raging element hears the voice of its Creator, and becomes completely calm; here, the tasteless element of water complies with the will of its Creator, and becomes sweet wine. "This miracle is not surprising to those who know that He who performs it is God the Lord. For He who here made wine in the six waterpots, is no other than He who every year makes it in the vine. As in this instance, the water which the servants poured out of the pitchers became, by

* There is remarkable condescension in these words of Jesus; He disdains not to uphold the *ruler of the feast* in the discharge of his own proper office, which was to taste the food, to start cheerful topics for conversation, "to lead the songs," etc.

the power of the Lord, wine, so likewise, through His power every year, the water which the clouds drop down from the skies, is in the vine converted into wine" (Augustine).

Ver. 9, 10. "*When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.*"

The ruler of the feast speaks quite in character as the ruler of a feast. He had observed what was the usual course at who knows how many weddings; first the good wine—then drunken guests—and at the last, poorer wine. To the governor of the feast, this order of proceeding seems all wrong; but his very astonishment cannot fail to make clear to the servants who had drawn the water, *what* Jesus had *said* to them and what they had *done* at His word, "*Draw out now!*"

Ver. 11. "*This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His Glory; and His disciples believed on Him.*"

As in chap. i. 14, so here do we hear the note struck in Isaiah xl. 5, again and again recurring. It is by this that the miracles of Jesus are distinguishable from the miracles of all the prophets, viz., that they are signs of *His* glory. "*He manifested forth His Glory,*" this is the precious Epiphany-theme which the seven Epiphany Gospels unfold, each in its own way.

In the *first sign which Jesus did*, the particular character of His glory was designed to come out in the clearest light. He brought me "to the banqueting-house, and His banner over me was love" (Cant. ii. 4), that was what the heavenly Solomon did to his bride at the marriage in Cana. It is in the character of a *bridegroom* that He means to exhibit Himself, whilst He gives what it properly belonged to the bridegroom to give.

Moses's first sign was turning water into *blood*, but the first sign through which Jesus reveals His glory, changes water into

wine. The glory of the Law inflicts wounds, the glory of the Gospel heals wounds. John the Baptist stepped forth in the power of a preacher of repentance, at once recognisable by his personal appearance and his manner of life (Matt. xi. 18), but the glory of the Preacher of kind lips, of the Consolation of all the children of men, shines forth with surpassing attractiveness in this wedding miracle, which changed the water of purification into the wine of joy. The Lord afterwards fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead—all of them sublime manifestations of His glory; but there lies something in this *first sign*, which the other miracles, although they all, up to the healing of Malchus's ear, have an aspect of kindness, of healing and of blessing, do not in an equal degree contain, and which yet could not be wanting in Him of whom it is said: "Such an high Priest became us." Not He in truth would have been disposed to say: "If they have no wine, then let them drink water!" At any rate, such is not the way our Jesus acts. He turns water into wine; He is a Friend full of delicate care for the interests of the family; He sees the bridegroom in a difficulty affecting his respectability, and helps him out of it, He will save him the shame of having to say to the guests: "I am sorry I have no more wine."

Does He not, then, embolden us to regard the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," as one of far extending import? Does not this, the kindest of miracles of the kindest of Beings, strengthen us in a joyful willingness to do what the Apostle says, namely, in everything, by prayer and supplication, to make our requests known unto God? (Phil. iv. 6.) Is not the rich gift of the wedding Guest, who is Himself the true Bridegroom, a sign of that fulness out of which we are nuptially to receive grace for grace?

And what a faithful domestic Friend *married people* possess in this wedding Guest of Cana. Did He lavish out wine in Cana, six water-pots at a time, and shall He in your house grudge even the giving of bread? No indeed. Cana's wine of comfort and joy is implied for every married pair.

Ought not the Saviour's example stimulate us to be kind to married people who are in need? Does not the want touch our hearts, which drew forth from the Friend and Patron of the marriage state His first miracle? Would He had more followers! Then the Dorcas society would have help which else is nowhere to be found. And should not the sour-visaged saints who would fain leave out of the marriage service these words : "Rejoice with bride and bridegroom in the fear of the Lord," be ashamed when they remember Cana.

Finally, as in the Christian life generally, so in marriage especially, the Lord's glory is revealed in this particular, namely, that His course is the direct opposite to that of the world, which gives *first* the best that it has, the intoxicating wine of pleasure, and afterwards the refuse, but the Lord Jesus always gives the good and the best *last*. "Men indeed give first the best and afterwards the worst, but God gives first cross and suffering, and afterwards honour and blessedness. He first makes a *bad conscience* and gives bad wine, yea, plain water, but afterwards He consoles with the promises of the gospel, which continue for ever." (Luther.) If God sends to the home of married people, during the first years of their marriage, all sorts of troubles and sorrows, they may be certain that He has a manifestation of His glory in view. If they only properly resign themselves to His will, and *do what He says*, if, in seeking first the kingdom of God, they keep the little pitchers of their hearts and house in readiness, then "His hour" will soon be come, when He will make merry with the sweet wine of joy both body and soul.

Of the time when we shall drink the fruit of the vine new with Him, it is still true to the present time : "*Mine hour is not yet come.*" But it will come *at last*!

"*And His disciples believed on Him,*" with these words the disciple John closes the account of this marriage. They had now seen somewhat of those "*greater things,*" which the Lord had promised to His disciples, and their faith was strengthened (Chap. i. 50). Angels of God, those heavenly guardians, tended

from this time the tender growth of their faith, until it was filled with Easter and Ascension flowers, and with Pentecostal fruits.

That John should express the *strengthening* of the disciples' faith by the words : "They *believed* on him," will not appear strange to a believer. On every occasion when the Lord afresh permits us to taste and see how glorious He is, does it not then seem to us as if we had never before truly believed, as if we had only first begun to-day really to believe ? Yes, Christians *continue* in faith so long as they daily *come* to faith. That is what St. Paul calls : "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, and pressing towards the prize " (Phil. iii. 12, 13).

The Temple of Jerusalem and the Temple of Jesus' Body.

CHAPTER II. 12—25.

May the zeal of the Lord, like a refiner's fire, purify us wholly, both body and soul, that we may be found a holy temple of the living God. Amen.

WHAT would have been more according to the will of the Lord Jesus, than that the marriage wine of grace, should already now begin to flow? Yet before it could flow, and with its streams refresh the wedding-church of the New Testament, the vessels must be first prepared and consecrated for its reception.

John the Baptist, that messenger before the face of the Lord, had now well nigh fulfilled his mission, and his cry : "*Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand !*" resounded from the mouth of the Lord of the kingdom of Heaven Himself : "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand : *repent ye, and believe the Gospel*" (Mark i. 15.) Now this word, "*Repent,*" obtains a substance—finds an embodiment—in the *purification of the Temple*, with which at a Passover feast in Jerusalem, the Lord commences His mission. That which John, according to the prophecy in Malachi, had sought to impress on the heads of the people :—*John*, the *Grace* of God, (for such is the import of the name), which calls sinners to *repentance*, this had now appeared full of Truth, in the true Prophet Jesus Christ. Through a period of three years did the Saviour, with unwearied love, discharge towards Israel this office, the mighty import of which is exhibited to us in this first purification of the Temple. Oh,

how earnestly did He desire to gather Jerusalem under the wings of His grace, and to renew the covenant which her sins had broken, that the destroying angel of judgment might pass by—“*Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse!*” (Mal. iv. 6.) But Jerusalem did not know the time of her visitation, “the hearts of the children” and “the hearts of the fathers” were not “turned” to each other; they were not gathered into one, through true repentance and reconciliation, in the heart of God, *their* God. The House of God has become a house of buying and selling, a den of robbers (Jer. vii. 11). And therefore the Lord comes—no longer as a Prophet, inviting them to repentance, but as the Angel of the Covenant, executing judgment—that He might sanctify Himself *upon* sinners, *in* whom His Grace had sought to sanctify itself in vain: He strikes the hardened stiff-necked people with the curse.

The great and terrible day of the Lord is set forth by the *second* purification of the Temple, with which the Lord—likewise at a passover feast—closes His office. See our commentary on the connexion between the *first* and *second* purification of the Temple, in Luke xix. 45, 46.

Ver. 12. “*After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples, and they continued there not many days.*”

Some fourteen days may now have passed, since the day with which St. John commences his Gospel history (Chap. i. 19.); for according to the Jewish custom, the marriage-feast in Cana lasted seven days. These were only a few days before the feast—the feast which it was the Lord’s intention to celebrate at Jerusalem, at which He should “come to His Temple.” Therefore He did not remain in Capernaum,* which He had chosen as

* *Capernaum*, lying not far from where the Jordan flows into the sea of Galilee, is called the town of Nahum, (the Prophet of that name,) and means: the town of the *comforter*. The true Nahum, the true Comforter could not have chosen a more beautiful spot for His abode. The situation of Capernaum in the district of Zabulon and Naphtali, is minutely described by St. Matthew. (Chap. iv. 13.) because the knowledge of its position, serves to make us understand the fulfilment of Isaiah’s Prophecy (Chap. viii. 23).

His abode instead of Nazareth, any length of time,—“not many days.” Mother, brethren and disciples accompany Him thither, the holy Family. The *brethren* are probably children of Mary’s sister, the wife of Cleopas (Alphæus), who had the same name as Mary. Thus, after the death of Joseph, who had taken to his own home the widow and her children, the two families continued to form one household, on which account it was the more natural that the *cousins* should be called *brothers*.

Ver. 13. “*And the Jew’s passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*”

It was at a feast of the Passover that the child Jesus, when twelve years old, discoursed concerning His Father in the Temple; it was at a feast of the Passover that the Son of Man, over whom the Heaven stood open, first revealed Himself as Lord of the Temple; and henceforth, from year to year, we see His mission, just about the time of the Passover, filled with the richest fruits of blessing. He is verily the true Paschal Lamb, come to confirm and fulfil the covenant (Dan. ix. 27) with the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Ver. 14. “*And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep, and the changers of money sitting.*”

In the Law the case was foreseen that “the way might be too far” for the people to carry what was necessary for sacrifice to the place which the Lord should choose to dwell there; and in that case it was to be bought with money (Deut. xiv. 24—26). Therefore, in itself there was nothing at all objectionable in the circumstance that sacrificial beasts were offered for sale to the Passover guests in the very vicinity of the Temple, nor yet that tables of money-changers were standing there, at which the people could change the Roman money for coinage which they might put into the Temple treasury. But the secularized, worldly mind of the Jews had carried things to that pitch, that, at the feast of the Passover, with its thousand of Paschal lambs, they thought much less of the future Lamb of God whom these shadowed forth, than on the opportunity for trade and gain,

which this "Passover fair" gave. The hubbub of the annual fair reached even into the court of the Temple, and instead of bringing meat-offerings to the Lord in righteousness, they spread out before Him hands polluted with usury, and prayed to Him with the lip, whilst in their heart they were harbouring idle and shameful talk, and were serving Mammon.

Ver. 15, 16. "*And when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the Temple, and the sheep and the oxen ; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables ; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence ; make not my Father's house, an house of merchandise !*"

At first sight, this commencement of Christ's work as Reformer might seem strange ; for surely, these buyers and sellers were not the worst sinners in Jerusalem ; the outward abuses which took place here in the Temple, were yet the least amongst those which were then in vogue.

What availed it, then, that these men, with their oxen, their sheep, and their money-boxes, were driven out of the Temple, if yet men's *hearts* continued full of abominations and all manner of filthiness ? What availed it that some bad fruit was shaken from the corrupt tree, if the tree itself was not made good ? Indeed it would be a lowering of Christ, if in the poor traders and money changers, we sought the exclusive objects of His indignation ; for then would the Lord—who in reality looks to find His joy in what passes in our inmost heart—stand on a level with the so-called reformers of the latest time, who would fain restore the leaky ship of a secularized Church, by polishing and patching up the tackling and rigging. No ! The scourge of the Lord, which is raised against the profaners of the Temple, smites rather into the heart of the sinful people ; and Chrysostom says with truth : " Christ proves Himself to be the good Physician, by striking at the *roots* of Israel's malady ; for the Temple was in the system of the body-politic the vital organ, which nourished it if it was sound, but poisoned it if it was corrupted."

In the external Temple, the whole of the covenant people,

viewed as the people of God, was, so to speak, comprised in one, so that what happened at this holy place, only shadowed forth the sum of those enormous sins which this covenant-breaking people hid and cherished in its midst. It is this that Malachi's prophecy has in view, this is the fulfilment of his prediction through the works of miracle and power which the Lord wrought, who thus is seen "coming to His Temple," and "purifying the sons of Levi."

This cleansing of the Temple is a *miraculous deed*. Jesus proves by deed the word which He spoke: "*My Father's House.*" The scourge in the hand of the poor Nazarene, and His word of kingly command: "*Take these things hence!*" controls and drives forth from the Temple the terrified dealers and money changers, as, afterwards, in the Garden, the guards fell suddenly to the ground when He said: "I am He!" In *the House of His Father He revealed His Glory*, a Glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father.

The cleansing of the temple was repeated three years later again; yet as we have seen, it is another operation of the "Purifier of silver," namely, the consuming judgment, which the second purification shadows forth. But in its first signification as a preaching, by symbolical act, of repentance for the restoration of the covenant, the purification of the Temple was destined to be repeated anew in that miraculous work in which the Lord 1500 years afterwards revealed His Glory in the Reformation of His Church. The history of the first, even more than of the second purification of the Temple, forms a text for the festival of the Reformation—a text, pointed out, one may say, by God Himself. By a divine Providence, the watchword also of the Reformation at its first commencement was a mighty "*Take these things hence!*"—and thus the traffic in indulgences, that epitome of Romish disorder, was cleared out of the House of God. "The word of the Lord as a strong scourge entered in, and put an end to that great spiritual plague, that oppressive weight, which though imposed by men, was nevertheless beyond human

power, and was unbearable. The word of the Lord entered in, and the tumult of their own ways, the vanity fair of self-righteousness and work-righteousness ceased—and there only remained in the Temple the Lord, with His apostles and disciples, with His own blessed Gospel.” (Löhe.)

It is, besides, truly edifying, in Luther’s exposition of our text, to observe the evangelical clearness and unfanatical sobriety with which this man of God, into whose hand the scourge of the Lord was delivered, has conceived his own and his brethren’s calling. He will know of no other scourge but the “scourge of the lips,” and of no other sword but the “sword of the Spirit,” which is the word of God.

“Since Christ’s kingdom, then, is not a power of the carnal sword, how is it He here deals with the priests of the Temple thus sternly and unkindly, and takes upon Himself that which usually belongs to the temporal magistrate? It is for this reason, that the Lord stood in the midst between the Old and New Testament, or between that which Moses had ordained amongst the people of Israel and that which Christ should establish after His death, through His Holy Spirit, and the preaching of the Gospel. And this shows that He is a Lord, that He holds both kinds of rule in His hand, the secular and the spiritual.” (Luther.)

Against the mingling of these two kinds of rule in the Church of God, Luther then sets himself in words which have proved prophetic, and which ought to be painted in large capitals before the eyes of the “Lutherans,” as they call themselves, who in our days are not ashamed to make it an article of saving doctrine, that the civil magistracy *must* exercise the supreme rule over the Church. “It is not the Pope that will hurt us, *he* will hardly take from us the Gospel, for he is too much beaten; but our youth from among our nobility, and the princes, also the wicked lawyers—they it is that shall do it, who now-a-days are violently thrusting in, and will fain teach the preachers what they ought to preach, who will force the people respecting the

sacraments, according to their will and pleasure; for [say they] obedience is due to secular authority, therefore must you do as we will have you. And thus the temporal and spiritual rule is kneaded into one cake. That is what the Pope has done; he has brought the sword of the lips into secular rule, and thereby the work of God has been put out. Now the leaf is turning over."

"But it ought to remain separate, and let him who can help to keep it so. For if princes [we add, or even "the sovereign people," Mr. Omnes, as Luther calls the mobocracy] will mix up the two together as they do now, then may God graciously grant us that we may not live long to behold such a calamity, for then every thing in the Christian religion must fall to ruins. Such has been the case in the popedom, where the bishops became earthly princes. And when now earthly lords become popes and bishops, so that we have to preach and say to them only what they like to hear, then let the foul fiend preach to them himself!—and preach he will, too! But let us pray to God that neither side may so abuse their office."

Ver. 17. "*And His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*"

The mild and condescending manifestation of the Lord's glory at the marriage in Cana, which had shed its sweet influence upon the hearts of the disciples, and which dwelt in their memory, and now *this* manifestation of His glory:—why, even the *disciples* themselves might not at first be able to understand this twofold beaming forth of what was one and the same Light—the real oneness of holy love and holy wrath (Luther says tersely: *zeal, i.e., wrathful love*) in Him who is the Truth; but they found themselves set to rights: a word of Scripture interpreted the Saviour's action to them. It was *the zeal of the Lord's house* that was doing that deed. This zeal had once burnt in David's breast; he had spent himself, been zealous well nigh to death, in the service of his God, whilst he rebuked the soulless sacrifice and the shameful lip-service of the hypo-

crites (Ps. iv. 6 ; xv. ; xxiv. ; xl. 7 ; li. 18, 19 ; exii. 139), and *therefore* it was that the reproach of the wicked fell upon him (Ps. lxi. 10).

But what in David was only anticipated and prefigured, was in the Son of David to be perfected and fulfilled in truth. It was His living zeal for the Lord's house, which brought Jesus from heaven to us, and this was the flame which kindled and consumed the sacrifice for which He presented Himself. As the disciples do here, so St. Paul afterwards remembers this passage from the Psalms (Rom. xv. 3).

If David had his share in the zeal, the fulness of which was exhibited in Christ, should not we Christians, Christ's *followers*, share therein yet more richly than David ? May the Lord ever grant to His house servants who, like Paul, are jealous over it with a godly jealousy ! (2 Cor. xi. 2).

What kind of *consuming* it was which the Saviour should experience through His zeal for God's house, the disciples at that time but little imagined ; it was only afterwards that they fully entered into the meaning of the words, in whose light they then for the first time saw Jesus in His true character. But the Lord Himself well knew the path through which these words would lighten His steps ; He well knew that His zeal for His father's house would in the end literally *consume* Him ; and what it was that He thought upon in this hour of zeal we learn from verse 19.

The *Jews*, for their part, struck by their own consciences, now perhaps themselves thought on what would be becoming in the Son of David ; for they encountered the zeal of the Messiah by a question concerning the authentication of His claims as the Christ.

Ver. 18. "*Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things ?*"

They saw not with seeing eyes ! Were not, then, those men who had been driven out of the temple, not one daring to resist

the Lord's zeal—were not they sign enough? Yes, the Jews, as they stood there, paralysed before the appearance of the powerful and terrible One, themselves authenticated His claim as Lord of the temple, as Him who might naturally, according to Malachi's prophecy, as in "His Father's house," do just what they saw Him doing. But they *refused* to yield themselves to the impression which was beginning to master their minds, and they stifled the voice of their own conscience. Therefore the Saviour withdraws Himself and hides the sign which they desire, and which was to be shown to them as the sign of all signs, as peculiarly the *sign of Christ*, under the veil of a holy riddle.

Ver. 19. "*Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*"

In the very act of *destroying this temple*, of breaking down and profaning the sacred place wherein God dwelt with His people, the Lord had just now caught the Jews. It was indeed against this very destroying of the temple that His zeal had wielded the scourge. Yet He sees that the Jews hate His correction. Therefore He says: "Go on then; if ye *will* do it, then ye *shall* do it, God will harden your hearts, go on with your laying waste the holy sanctuary, yea, utterly destroy this temple, then will I not cleanse it as I do now, but raise it up again on the third day altogether new. That shall be your sign!"

Ver. 20. "*Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days?*"

From these words it appears as if the Jews understood by the temple nothing more than that building of stone, which, forty-six years before, Herod had begun to restore. Yet in truth their thoughts concerning the temple were not quite so meagre as one might thus at first imagine, only they were unwilling to enter any further into a theme so adverse to them as that of the house and kingdom of God, and therefore they hasten to make out that the Lord had uttered a piece of arrogant folly,—in derision, perhaps, also, of the carpenter's Son.

That the meaning of His words did not entirely escape them, is shown by the interpretation put upon them by the false witnesses before Caiaphas: "We heard him say, I will destroy this temple *that is made with hands*, and within three days I will build another *made without hands*," which was a perfectly correct interpretation, only that the "*destroy*" is maliciously perverted into "*I will destroy*," and thus the true meaning is lost—a meaning which even by the disciples was not understood until after the Lord's resurrection.

Ver. 21, 22. "*But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them: and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.*"

Many interpreters are of opinion that whilst saying the words, "Destroy *this* temple!" Jesus pointed with His finger to His body. But in that case, the Lord's saying would not have been hidden until after His resurrection, not at least from this disciples. Besides, He would then have by no means pointed *away* from the temple at Jerusalem, rather He would have distinctly pointed *at* what was the most holy place of *that very* temple (Dan ix. 24). For in the body of Jesus had the temple at Jerusalem its reality. The glory of God, which once dwelt in the first temple, but which had not entered again into this the second temple, for the most holy place was empty, now dwelt full of grace and truth in the flesh which the Eternal Word had assumed, and when the Only-Begotten of the Father—"the Lord whom ye seek," and "the Messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in" (Mal. iii. 1)—came to His temple, then was Haggai's prophecy approaching its fulfilment—the glory of this latter house was becoming greater than that of the former (Hagg. ii. 9). We have seen this in chap. i. 14.

But this same temple-destroying spirit which dishonoured the outward sanctuary at Jerusalem, proceeded also to kill the inward life's kernel of this sanctuary, to destroy the temple of Jesus' body. When the Jews nailed their King to the cross,

and derided Him : " Ah, Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days ! " they were even then destroying their own temple also. With the *body*, the *shadow* of the body was also being done away, for the temple was really the shadow projected before the eyes of the covenant-people by the coming Christ ; for "*the body is of Christ*" (Col. ii. 17). The house of stone continued to stand for a little while longer, but it was " left desolate," no longer a shadow of Israel's real blessing ; and without her sanctuary the nation was a body without a soul, a carcase, around which the eagles were in all haste gathering themselves together (Luke xvii. 37).

But into the midst of the hour of darkness, whose power destroyed the temple of Jesus' body, now flashed also the bright light of the sign which the Lord had promised to show : "*In three days I will raise it up.*" And when on the third day the temple of Jesus' body raised itself out of Joseph's grave, there with it and in it the substance of the temple at Jerusalem also was raised up again (Ezek. xl. 1 ; Zech. vi. 12) ; transformed, however, and glorified into a temple in spirit and in truth ; as the true tabernacle of God's blessed habitation with His people, as He dwells among them in word and sacrament ; as the Church of the New Testament, the house of the living God, the congregation of the saints, which stands forth before our view as *His body*.

Like the sign which was promised to the people, of Jonas, (Matt. xii. 39,) this sign also of the Temple destroyed in Christ's death, and raised up again in His resurrection, only conduced to the salvation of those who—like the disciples—*believed the Scriptures*, those who in faith were built as living stones into the New Testament Temple. Not even did this sign compel any man to believe. Yes ; and even at the present time, no other sign is given to the world but this sign of Jonas and the Temple. Out of every defeat, there rises up to the Church a victory ; out of every shame, a glory ; for defeated and clothed with shame—" destroyed"—she bears the marks of her Lord,

and conceals within the power of His resurrection, "to be raised up in three days."

But comfort and refreshment in her glory, which is still a hidden one, are found only by believers, for they only have enlightened eyes, enabling them to see in the *history* of the Church an edifying interpretation of their Lord's *words*. But there will be a time when the raised up Temple of the Body of Jesus shall be manifest before every eye with the bridal adornment of eternal youth and unfading beauty; then those who dwell in God's Tabernacle shall rejoice, and those who have destroyed her shall weep and howl with anguish. The holy John, who preserved in his faithful memory these words concerning the Temple of Jesus' Body, is the same also who was held worthy to see "the holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

When exactly three years after the time of this Passover feast the "three days" were fulfilled, and when thus the light of fulfilment illuminated the obscurity of this prediction of Christ's, then the disciples believed the *Scripture* and the *word which Jesus had said*. They then perceived the mysterious connexion which even in the Old Testament was established between the Temple at Jerusalem and the Temple of Jesus' Body.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, in particular, is an expression of this apostolical insight. Old Chemnitz sets forth the disciples, in their relation to the words which Jesus spake to them, as a pattern to all readers of the Bible. "We ought not," he says, "immediately to reject and throw away what we cannot at the first glance comprehend in the holy Scriptures, neither ought we immediately to despair of understanding, where we cannot immediately penetrate into the deep laid secrets of Scripture. For it is *by degrees* that the Spirit leads us on to the perception of the Truth. If it be not immediately granted us to explore the manner of God's dealings, we will not the less on that account attend to the word; it will, when its time comes, like a grain of seed deposited in the soil, bring forth its fruit nevertheless."

“ *When we stand under our cross*, God’s promises are generally wont to sound to us like riddles; but they are not on that account to be unheeded, but rather committed to our soul in thoughtfulness and meditation: when the trial gains such an end as we are able to bear, then the sense of the promises dawns upon our minds, and, like the disciples, we remember that the Lord has said this to us.”

Ver. 23. “ *Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the Feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did.*”

In fact, at the Feast of the Passover, *all* Israel assembled at Jerusalem; and though the “Jews,” content with their own holiness, had no mind for a Saviour, there were yet many hearts—especially from peaceful Galilee—which were fitted to receive the impression from the words and works of Jesus, “That a great Prophet had risen up among them, and that God had visited His people” (Luke vii. 16). They believed in His *Name*, which invested His person like a garment, and which was just then so gloriously displaying itself in His miracles.

Still the roots of the “*belief*” of these “*many*” did not as yet strike very deep. “But this same faith is yet an imperfectly formed faith—a young faith—the faith of those who, without any ado, come to believe, but when they hear anything which does not please them, or which they had not looked for, then they quickly bolt back again, fall once more into their old dreams” (Luther).

There were those who, aroused with joy, praised the Messiah’s name *when they saw the miracles which He did*: but whether they would ever come so far as to the earnest prayer: “*Do on me a miracle!*”—whether they would ever become desirous of knowing Jesus as Jesus in their own heart’s experience, was as yet to be proved.

Many Nicodemus souls there certainly were not amongst them. The Lord well understands the joyful springing up of the seed which yet has not really taken root (Matt. xiii. 20, 21),

the weathercock changeableness of the corrupt heart of man; therefore we read further:

Ver. 24, 25. "*But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.*"

He did not *commit*, i.e., entrust himself to them; not as though the Lord thrust them from Him; it was rather from a holy love, an anxiety for the good of souls, that He did not return *their* confidence, which was as yet of a very uncertain nature, by a confidence on His side (a self-surrender, as of the bridegroom to the bride, see Hos. ii. 20), from which they might have falsely imagined: We are now converted, we are true disciples of Jesus! The Lord *knew them all*, because He knew the human nature common to all; He needed not that any one should testify of *a* man, for He saw through *men*. Christ's power of trying the spirits of men consists in not judging according to a superficial sight of the eyes, or a knowledge not to be depended upon, but in penetrating into the inmost ground of the heart (Isa. xi. 3, comp. with 1 Sam. xvi. 7).

Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins (1 Tim. v. 22): this apostolical warning has a foreshadowing basis in our Lord's behaviour towards these awakened people in our text. Pastors, and all to whom souls are committed, here learn an important point in the care of souls. We are very liable to overvalue the first beginnings of faith in souls, particularly where *we* have been the instrument of their awakening. In such cases it concerns us to pray for an impartially-judging love, and for the keen glance of a single eye, in order that we may not, through an over-sanguine "confidence," occasion harm to those awakened souls, and thus make ourselves partakers of the sins which follow in the train of backsliding, that unclean spirit returning to dwell there.

What is contained in the expression, He did not *commit*, or *confide Himself* to them, we shall learn in the next Bible study, when we shall listen to the discourse in which the Lord *confided Himself* to Nicodemus.

Jesus' Discourse with Nicodemus.

I. REGENERATION AND ATONEMENT.—CHAPTER III. 1—15.

O Lord, since Thou hast brought it in our power to do what is necessary to our salvation, help us, we beseech Thee, that we may not receive such Grace of Thine in vain. Amen.

THE sign of the Purification of the Temple had struck many, and brought them up near even to the door of the kingdom of God, whose King, Jesus of Nazareth, was there in their midst. The impression that many received was so powerful that St. John ventures to call it a "believing in the name of Jesus." But, as we have already observed, there were *not* many who, quietly submitting themselves to preventing Grace, and faithful in that which they had, completely got themselves by faith into the name of Jesus, and allowed themselves to be completely gained by love into His kingdom : to the greater part of them the Saviour could *not* commit Himself, because they would not commit themselves to Him, as poor sinners, asking : "What must I do to be saved?"

But there was one, however, who painful as he felt it to be, could not forbear,—he must come inquiring to Jesus, committing himself to Him : that one was *Nicodemus*. In return, Jesus commits Himself to him in that discourse which we are now about to consider ; and may He be pleased to bless the exposition of it to us ; yea, may it be to us, as if He also were reading in *our* questioning souls, and were also discoursing with us, ⁸⁷ indeed He in reality does.

The Purification of the Temple it was which especially showed Nicodemus the way to Jesus ; the *inward* purification

of the Temple, which he and every sinner must experience within himself if he would be saved, is, then, likewise the subject of the discourse in which Jesus *commits* Himself to him.

Ver. 1, 2. "*There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews : the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art come from God, a Teacher, for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him.*"

The people as a whole, "the Jews," and especially the Pharisees, did not open to the knocking Saviour ; only single individuals knew the time of Israel's visitation ; therefore St. John writes : *There was a man, &c.*

A man from among the *Pharisees* was Nicodemus, and a *ruler of the Jews*, that is, a member of the high council (chap. vii. 50.) What wonder that he should come to Jesus *by night* ? John discloses to us the cause of this *night* visit, when at length the shy faith of this distinguished night-disciple breaks forth into the open day, and "shines as the sun"—in the history of Jesus' burial (chap. xix. 39) : "There came also Nicodemus, which *at the first* came to Jesus *by night*," as second to Joseph of Arimathea, who also *formerly* had been "*secretly* a disciple of Jesus, *for fear of the Jews.*" This fear Nicodemus had now not yet overcome.

Does then the severe word apply to him : "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God," with which St. John censures the rulers who did not like to confess Christ for fear of the Pharisees ? (Chap. xii. 42, 43.) Yes, it does indeed apply to him on this night ; but he has already begun to escape from the curse of this word, for although it is by *night*, yet he *comes* ! And the Saviour watches for him. He receives him, "not surlily nor grimly," but kindly and affably, with a mark of the Messiah, with the fulfilment of the promise in Isaiah lii. 2. &c., of not quenching the smoking flax. But only in His parting word, and not till then, He lays gently, quite gently, His hand upon that fear of man which was the sore on the mind

of His night-guest. Praised be the meek and holy One, with Him we are well taught !

Quite in character with the state of heart, in which Nicodemus could not forbear coming to Jesus, but yet could not prevail upon himself to come except by night, is the address with which he introduces himself to the Lord. The arrested, salvation-craving Nicodemus, and the Pharisaical ruler of the Jews, struggle for the mastery in his soul. Half ashamed of the nightly hour of his visit, half embarrassed how to confide to the Prophet his solicitude, without in some degree foregoing his dignity as a ruler, he commences : “ *Rabbi, we know,*” he speaks in the plural number, *we* ; to say “ I know,” would have been for him too personal, too close. He, as it were, puts forward his fellow-rulers, and hides himself behind them.

“ We know that Thou art *come from God.*” Did they really know that ? in the full sense of the word, in the sense in which the Prophets promise Him *who should come* ? in the sense of John the Baptist ? Nicodemus appears—just because he speaks in the plural number—to have said too much ; abruptly he breaks off the point from the words : “ come from God,” by adding :—“ *a Teacher,*” and further : “ for no man can do these miracles that *Thou* doest, *except God be with him.*” The fair confession with which he commences : “ *Thou art come from God,*” thus appears shrunken down to what is in this connexion a tame expression, which would be true of every pious Israelite—“ God is with thee.”

Ver. 3. “ *Jesus answered.*”

Before we hear the *answer*, let us look for Nicodemus’ *question* : “ *We know, &c.*” Is that a question ? It does not appear to be so. And yet the Saviour must have heard in Nicodemus’ words a question, for the Evangelist calls what Jesus here says, an *answer*. Some are of opinion that something is omitted between verses 2 and 3, but for this supposition we have neither justification nor motive. The Lord might certainly have met His visitor with the question, “ What seekest

thou with me?" But He saw, well He saw, how difficult it proved to poor Nicodemus to throw away the disguise of that general, "*We know*," and to express the motive which had led him by night to Jesus.

Answering the question, the question of the *kingdom* which stirred Nicodemus' inmost soul but which he was as yet too much of a Pharisee and a ruler to give utterance to in a direct manner, this "Teacher and Doer of miracles" breaks through the barriers of distant reserve which the shy and embarrassed guest had interposed in his introductory words, and penetrating and pressing forward into the very depth of his heart, He says to him, "*Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born anew,* he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*"

The miracles which the Prince of the Kingdom of Heaven was working, were adapted to allure men to seek the knowledge of Him and thus attain to the experience of those times of refreshing which had been promised by the Prophets; but to know Him truly, actually to taste the blessings of His Kingdom, and thus to be saved—for this something more was requisite than Nicodemus as yet was aware of, and it is just that *more* after which his soul is secretly inquiring, and which it now learns in the words: *be born anew*.

This language could not have sounded wholly strange to Nicodemus. If there had been nothing more than the reference in the Old Testament to the "circumcision of the heart" (Deut. xxx. 6), and the promise of the "new heart" and the "new spirit" (Jer. iv. 4), this might have been enough to serve as a key to the meaning of what Jesus had said; but there was more: the Jews, following up the imagery presented in passages such as Ps. lxxxvii. 4-6 ("Of Zion it shall be said, this and that

* The Greek word *anōthen* has a twofold signification: *from above*, and *over again*, or *anew*. Either sense suits here. It is true that John frequently mentions being born *of God*, and being born *from above* (chap. i. 13; 1 John ii. 29, iii. 9, iv. 7, v. 1, 4, 18); but yet, the connection plainly shows that the Lord had said, *born anew*.

man was born in her”), were accustomed to call the conversion of heathens to Israel, a “new birth” into the race of Abraham, and the converts themselves were styled “new creatures” and “new-born babes” (comp. 1 Pet. ii. 2); indeed, a rabbinical saying speaks of repentance in the following words: “A man of repentance must become just like one who was born to-day.” But certainly it might well startle the Pharisee and Ruler to hear the Saviour make a new birth the necessary condition for *all*, even for *him*, of entering into the kingdom of God. For even if he knew of a certain so-called new birth, yet of that real new birth of which Jesus speaks, he knew nothing.

We must not say that *to be born anew* is a *figurative* expression. The new spiritual birth, it is true, has in many points its image in the old carnal birth; but by adding an “as it were” to the “being born anew,” we rob the expression designedly used by our Lord of its proper force. It is a real new birth, *in the proper sense of the term*, which the children of Adam, without distinction, must experience, if they would see the kingdom of God as having an interest therein.

It is not merely the bad fruit of our sinful life which shuts us out from the kingdom of God, but it is also the rotten tree of our corrupt *nature* which does so. We, born sinners that we are, require not to *do* something new, but, first of all, ourselves to *become* new. Luther says: “I speak not of new articles, laws, or works, for of them there are already more which the law requires than you can do or keep; but what I teach is this: *you must become entirely different people*. My teaching is not of doing and leaving undone, but of *becoming*; so that the term shall be, not having done new work, but having first *become new*; not having lived differently, but being *born differently*.”

“It will not do that we place the doing before, or together with, the becoming, the fruit before, or at the same time with, the root; but first the tree must be new, and the root must be good and of the right sort, if the fruit and the work are to be-

come good. It is not the foot and the hand, or works of the foot and the hand which must be changed, but the person himself—that is, the whole man. Where this does not take place, there no work is of any avail or help, neither can the man see the kingdom of God; in other words, he must still remain under sin and eternal death.”

The eye which sees the light of this world, thou hast not made for thyself, but thou art born with it; in like manner, the eye which sees the kingdom of God, thou hast not made for thyself, but thou art born anew with it. The sending forth of the breath of the living God (Ps. civ. 30), produces also the old carnal birth, and every child born of man is a work of God’s creative power (Ps. cxxxix. 13, &c.); and so, in like manner, at the new spiritual birth, the same God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, speaks the *Let there be!* of His almighty love (2 Cor. iv. 6), and every child of God confesses himself a work of divine grace, and his sonship a received sonship (Eph. ii. 10). “I thank Thee for that I am *wonderfully* made,” David says; and the second birth, also, is a wonderful mystery, the result of which we indeed perceive, but its process we cannot comprehend.

Nicodemus at first feels somewhat hurt at the Lord’s words. The pharisaical ruler in him takes up the word:

Ver. 4. “*Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?*”

Can we suppose that he really had *not at all* understood the Lord’s words? Yes, surely something he had understood of them. He had understood that the Lord meant *him*; he had understood the drift of His words to be, that *his* seeing the kingdom of God was bound up with the necessary condition of the new birth; he had understood all this,—but just this complete annihilation to which his old man seemed thereby to be condemned, was more than he could bear. He, therefore, did not care to think out the bearing of what Jesus had said in silent

meditation ; he purposely fastens upon the outward sense of His words, and seeks to parry their application to himself with the exclamation, "*How can a man be born when he is old ?*"—an old man, for example, like me? And in order to evade the requirement that he must become a new creature, he pleads the impossibility of its being fulfilled ; for how can there be the "new birth" without a second birth of the body ? "*Can he enter again into his mother's womb and be born ?*"

See how slow to believe is the heart even of a Nicodemus ! He comes to Jesus,—he has no rest in his old life ; neither the Pharisee nor the Ruler can quiet his heart before God ; he longs for the sight of the kingdom of God and for the possession of its blessings ;—and yet, as he now stands before the door of the kingdom of heaven, it appears to him too narrow,—as a needle's eye, narrow—for a man of his standing ! He writhes and twists himself in order yet to escape the conclusion: *Thou*, thou old Nicodemus, must become like a child, must begin all over again, must—*be born anew*, otherwise thou wilt not see the kingdom of God !

Dost thou properly understand this companion-picture to the rich young man ? In this old man, who finds it so intensely hard to become quite little, quite poor, quit of all that was his own, dost thou recognise what is to the very bottom the disposition of thine own nature as well ? Oh, if we had not a Jesus, such as our Jesus is, we must have despaired of ever seeing the kingdom of God ! It cannot but excite our adoring admiration to observe how the Saviour meets Nicodemus,—meets him in that spirit of love which *will* not be provoked. Not offended by a question, the folly of which proceeded more from a fault of the heart than of the understanding. He addresses Himself to that ear which, in the deepest recesses of Nicodemus' conscience, was still awake to listen.

Ver. 5. "*Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*"

May we not conjecture that Nicodemus had hitherto belonged to *those* Pharisees of whom St. Luke says, that they *rejected* the counsel of God against themselves, and *would not be baptised* with the baptism of John? (Luke vii. 30). He must surely have rejected John's baptism, otherwise the Lord's words about regeneration would have sounded to him as actually consolatory. Now the Lord brings forward the baptism of John, which He Himself, as the Lamb of God, had not despised, before Nicodemus' view also, as something worthy of honour. For, in their first signification, it is that to which His words refer. We have before had occasion to observe that the baptism of John was not a baptism of water without the Spirit; the Holy Ghost was present with the water of John's Baptism in the same way as He was generally present and in operation before the work of the new creation was accomplished by Jesus' glorification.

But full of Grace and Truth is He present with, in and under the water of the baptism, which is in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Just as, at the first creation, He hovered over the waters of the earth (Gen. i. 2) which was then to be fashioned, in order to work into the creation the Life of the God of order, so He is to be found present in the water of baptism, in order to endue the new creation with the Life of the God of all consolation, and to sanctify it to be a habitation of the Triune God.

Be sure you rightly understand these words of the Saviour, for a mighty deal depends thereon. He does not speak of *two* baptisms, but of *one*; not of *two* second births, but of *one*; not of one second birth of water without the Spirit, and of another of the Spirit without water but of the single one, of *water* AND the *Spirit*. What, therefore, God has joined together, let not man put asunder. The holy apostles have not put it asunder. "According to His mercy He saved us," says St. Paul, "by the bath of Regeneration and renewing of the *Holy Ghost*" (Tit. iii. 5). "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing [the

bath] of water by the word"—which "word" has just the effect of giving the presence of the Spirit (Eph. v. 25, 26). And in the great typical baptism of the children of Israel the Spirit and water are found together: "They were all baptised unto Moses in the cloud, (the sign of the presence of Divine Grace) and in the *sea*" (1 Cor. x. 2; comp. with 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21).

According to Scripture, then, we maintain that "both of them remain together, and that one is born again of water, through the Holy Spirit, or by the Spirit, present at and with the water; that at this birth, the Spirit is as the Man, the water as the Woman and Mother." (Luther).

Well, but is it, then, to be called a *requirement* when the Saviour says, "*Ye must be born anew!*" Yes, it is a requirement, but it is an evangelical, not a legal requirement. The new birth is a *gift* of compassionate love, which we are to get *bestowed* upon us. Life from God, new life in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, rests upon a more secure foundation than we poor sinners could lay of our own strength. It rests on the immoveable foundation of an *act of God*, by which we are anew born. And this saving act the Lord our God performs, not as enthusiasts will have it, down out of Heaven in a purely inward manner, in the way of thought only, but through the outward office of the Word and the Sacraments, in which the Holy Spirit mightily works (2 Cor. iii. 8). The blessings of Grace belonging to God's kingdom are attainable, not unapproachable.

"For He does not speak of a Spirit which is hidden and cannot be perceived, as He is personally in His Divine Essence, nakedly and without means, in and by Himself, but One which reveals Himself in the outward office where He is heard and seen, viz., in the preaching office of the Gospel and of the Sacraments. For God will not, even with the Spirit, deal and act hiddenly and secretly, or do with each individual soul a thing peculiar to that soul alone; for who else could learn, or be sure,

where or how he might seek or find the Holy Ghost? but God has so ordered it, that the Holy Spirit shall be in conjunction with the Word and Sacrament, manifest before the ears and eyes of men, and shall work through such outward office, that we may know that what takes place *then*, has taken place really through the Holy Ghost" (Luther).

The *birth* to life in the kingdom of God, as well as the *nourishment* of this new life, are each of them a sacramental mystery; the former takes place in the sacrament of holy baptism, the latter in the sacrament of the altar; "except a man *be born of water and of the Spirit*, he cannot *enter* into the kingdom of God:" and "except ye *eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood*, ye have no life in you;" "he that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, *dwelleth in Me and I in Him*" (chap. vi. 53-56). By baptism, we *enter* into the kingdom of God, and by the Lord's Supper, those who have entered *remain* in the fellowship of the kingdom.

Thus, then, I know that I am born anew, for I am baptized. As a *child* I was baptized, in that should I heartily rejoice; I will not resist the Holy Spirit, of which I was born on the day of my baptism, and I encourage myself still, after, alas! so many wanderings, in the thought of my baptism, and would fain with strong faith grasp its treasures of grace and find them my own. Ay, old men (such as Nicodemus) must become like unresisting, submissive little children, if they would enter into the kingdom of God. If any passage of Scripture serves to establish infant baptism, it is this: "*Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*," together with the command which is placed in the gospel of the baptismal service: "Suffer the *little children* to come unto Me, and forbid them not, *for of such is the kingdom of God*" (Mark x. 14).

If of such is the kingdom of heaven, they also *ought* to enter in; and if yet they *cannot* enter in without the birth of water and of the Spirit, why should we then forbid them the water of

baptism, and hope for them doors of entrance into the kingdom of heaven, which are only of our own devising?

That the Anabaptists now raise their heads so boldly, even in Germany, and are allowed to lead captive so many, often simple and earnest souls,—in this fact we have indeed to recognize, in the first place, a frightful judgment on the secularized police-churches,* in whose midst infant baptism has become a bye-word and a fool's play—are not the “democratic baptismal processions” in Berlin such a parody of the passage in Matth. viii. 6, as is enough to fill one with horror? But also, the truth of the Word: “*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,*” is set before us by the Lord in a very clear light in the Sacramentalists. If once the initial grace and gift in baptism be lightly esteemed, if we empty the sacrament of its heavenly contents, and make of it merely a “vow,” we are then on the road to transform *faith* into a certain “turn of thought,” and *justification* into a certain “turn of character,” and then, indeed, there no longer remains any bath of regeneration, through which God our Saviour saves those who are born of the flesh, the children also whom His people bring to Him.

Augustine says: “No one can attain to eternal life unless through baptism he is born again, not even can children; *for then Christ needed not to have died for them, which no Christian dares to deny.* But Christ died for the ungodly. . . . If little ones are not wounded through the deep hurt of original sin, why does the pious anxiety of their friends bring them to Christ the Physician, that is to say, to the reception of the sacrament of eternal life? Why do we not say to them in the Church: Take these innocents away; they that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick!”

These words of Augustine's (against the Pelagian heretics) we here quote, the rather, first, because they show how firmly established infant baptism was in the view of the ancient

* *Polizei-kirchen*, i.e., churches, in which divine ordinances are treated as mere creatures of political appointment.—*Tr.*

Church—so firmly, that from it the deniers of original sin might be refuted; and next, because from these words we see that Augustine had *not* yet in his mind that completion of his doctrine of predestination and election—a doctrine which certainly might run off into error—which we see in the Calvinists.

The man, of whose name the Church of God will never be ashamed, has above all approved his knighthood in the heroic conflict which he maintained against the *sacramentless* dreamers of his time and of ours, ay, of all time. May His testimony ever anew be precious to us! (Comp. especially Luther's exposition of Gal. v. 9). Yes, may God help us to keep and guard the precious pearl of the sacrament! We will not, and we cannot, be without it, either in the holy supper, or in holy baptism.

This, therefore, is certain, *thou canst enter into the kingdom of God*, for thou wast born again of water and of the Spirit in thy baptism. But in conformity therewith, ask thyself whether thou art now, by virtue of thy baptism, truly *living* in the kingdom of God, whether thou art *dwelling* in Christ and He in thee, because thou *believest*? A new-born child is just a child, not a man; through birth he has life, but he means to grow and to increase, and also to lay aside what in him is childish. Now all growth and increase in the spiritual, eternal life takes place by means of *faith*, which on that account has been beautifully called by the ancients, the *sucking root* of the tree of life. As the Saviour, in Mark xvi., joins together *baptism and faith*, so He does the same here. (Compare from verse 15 onwards).

Both these statements are equally true: baptism *imparts* faith, and baptism profits him only who believes. But *faith* has here a twofold meaning. In the case of those who desire believingly to receive baptism, the Word has imparted a receptivity of salvation and a longing for salvation, so that they now yield themselves to the Divine power working in that new birth which they meet with in baptism, and comply with its

operation upon them. This state of mind in which Ananias found Saul, and Peter Cornelius, Scripture already calls *faith*; it is the “rudimental faith,”* that faith which so often comes before us in St. John’s gospel. But the faith which is imparted *through* baptism, and which acts in the reception of the preached Word, is the certainty of that second birth which has been experienced, wherein the old life is mortified through Christ’s death, and the foundation laid of a new life by virtue of Christ’s life.

This faith is the consciousness of the new creature which is in Christ, and the germ of this faith is laid by baptism in the children of Christian parents, who, from their mother’s womb, are devoted to God (1 Cor. vii. 14), and who, according to the testimony of Scripture, are fitted to receive what God means to work in them; yes, more fitted than the old, who are so hard to be brought to an acquiescent self-surrender.

Thus regeneration is the commencement of life in the kingdom of heaven, and indeed a commencement in which potentially are included a joyful continuance and a blessed end.

“Just as the natural birth places a man not at the end, but at the beginning of temporal life and development, so by the name *Regeneration* is not meant the highest maturity of man which is possible in the kingdom of God, but only the entrance and commencement, from which the way to the goal of complete maturity stands open. Regeneration is a tender germ, which promises blossom and fruit—a spark which is capable of becoming a flame; a spring which is capable of growing into a river; a new, Divine life, which, as well as life in general, the almighty, all-wise God, has subjected to the laws of a continual growth—a growth striving from within towards a development without.”

“Truly it is an expression worthy of its Master, but which also summons God and holy angels to watch over every young

* *Rudimental faith.* In the text; “*Milchglaube*,” between inverted commas; apparently a similar idiomatical compound to *Milchhaar*, which is the down that on the face precedes the growth of the beard.—*Tr.*

product of that new birth. For think what ruin Satan may effect in so tender a beginning, unless God's eyes are continually open, and unless the flaming swords of angels control the wicked one! May God be gracious to all His regenerated children, and preserve to them their heavenly life by the exercise of His own power! For, in fact, we are told that our old birth, our own endeavour and zeal, can find no favour before God, but that absolutely everything, ay, everything, depends on the new birth, and the growth of that new birth to its complete maturity" (Löhe).

Spener and *Zinzendorf*, *Scheibel*, and the Church-elder (well known to the Lutherans of Prussia) *Daniel Tschierley** may be referred to as examples (and edifying examples they are) of the uninterrupted working of baptismal grace, of the steady growth of the life which in regeneration was implanted in the soul. But, alas, how *rare* are such examples! Happy he who finds his way back to his father's house as the prodigal did!

Ver. 6. "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*"

This verse substantiates the one immediately before it. Only *that* can enter into the kingdom of God which rejoices to live in the element of this kingdom, in the Holy Ghost; but *flesh* is full of enmity against this holy element of the kingdom; therefore that which is flesh cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Now Nicodemus was flesh, as certainly as he was *born* of flesh; if it had been really possible for him to come again out of his mother's womb, he would again have been flesh, born of flesh. Since the time that fallen Adam begat a son, who was after *his* likeness, and therefore wanting in the righteousness and glory of God, having a corrupt nature, a child of wrath—since that time, I say, flesh, as it begat and bare, has, from generation to generation, impressed all that was begotten and born of it, with its own wretched, fleshly image. "*My Spirit* shall not always

* Let me here urgently recommend F. Kellner's description of the course of Tschierley's life. Breslau, 1850.

strive with man, *for that he also is flesh*;" thus the Lord complains before the Deluge, when flesh, through the mixture of the pious with the wicked, had reached another step in its career of corruption; and even to the race of Noah, delivered as it was from the Flood, still the word applies, "The imagination of man's heart is evil *from his youth*" (Gen. viii. 21), from his *birth*.

David, when contemplating himself in the mirror of repentance, in the 51st Psalm, sighs over this inheritance of flesh (ver. 7); and mark how earnestly he longs after the new birth: "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!*" Comp. Deut. v. 29. With man's birth into the flesh, his heart, the very innermost *I* of his being, falls under the bondage of the flesh. When elsewhere Scripture calls the natural man (Rom. viii. 5), as apart from the life of the Holy Ghost, *fleshly*, this is in perfect agreement with the statement now before us, that man is *flesh*. *Man* and *flesh*, as *God* and *spirit*, are used by the Prophet as co-extensive and convertible terms, when we read, "The Egyptians are *men*, and not *God*, and their horses *flesh*, and not *spirit*" (Isa. xxxi. 3). It is not that there is *something* in us that is fleshly, but *all* (if it is so); even the "most spiritual thing," produced by nature's own will, though it were "angelic spirituality," Scripture, nevertheless, inexorably gives up to the "*fleshly mind*" (Col. ii. 18).

If, then, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God—and they cannot, any more than a blind man can see the light, or the panther graze upon the herb of the field—then we have by nature *nothing*, no mind or faculty whatever, whereby we might understand the kingdom of God. Therefore we must be born again; *we that are flesh, born of the flesh, must become spirit by being born of the Spirit*. Not that the flesh of the regenerated is *changed* into spirit, rather it dies—its deeds are mortified, put to death through the Spirit (Rom. viii. 13); that which was born of corruptible seed makes room for that born again of incorruptible seed (1 Pet. i. 23). What is wanting in us who are flesh is

restored, and what is corrupt is made good, and what is wretched is made holy by the Holy Ghost, of whom we are born anew. He, the Holy Ghost, *has* life, and therefore can and will *give* it to those who, born of Him, become what He is. He has righteousness, and He gives it to the regenerated, who are never wanting in the glory which they ought to have in God. He has power of sanctification, and He implants it in the regenerated, whose holiness begins in this life (Gal. ii. 20)—in a life yet *in* the flesh, but not after the flesh (Rom. viii. 12)—in order to be accomplished in the life which is to come. He has peace and joy, and He therewith fills the regenerated, who heretofore were not children (only children of wrath), but who now are children (children of grace), and joyfully cry, Abba, Father! That is what the Holy Ghost does, and He does it *through the washing of water in the Word*.

Born of *water and of the Spirit*, we are—not water and spirit, but—spirit; and therefore in this verse the Saviour, without specifying again the element of *baptism*, in contrast with what is born of the flesh, simply says, *That which is born of the Spirit is spirit*.

Praised be the Love which had brought it to pass that the Holy Ghost *can* thus deal with sinners! “He shall receive of *mine*,” says the Saviour, speaking of the Comforter who was to glorify Him in them that were His (chap. xvi. 14). Before the promise, “Afterwards I will pour out *my Spirit upon all flesh*,” could be fulfilled, and the Holy Ghost could act amongst sinners in the fulness of regenerating power, it was necessary that Jesus should be glorified (chap. vii. 39). It was necessary,—not indeed that He should be *born out of the flesh* for He was born as the “*Holy thing*,” conceived by the Holy Ghost,—but it *was* necessary that He should *come* in the flesh, become partaker of our flesh, in its weakness and in its curse, in order to accomplish in this our flesh these two things, both that he might represent the righteousness which was wanting in the flesh of the first man, and also that He might make atone-

ment for the guilt which lay heavy on the flesh of the first Adam; yes, it was necessary that through His own baptism of blood, He should make our baptism efficient, through which "we are buried with Him," as the Apostle says, "unto death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life," walk as members of the body of our now *glorified* Saviour.

We have not digressed from our subject whilst we have been thus trying to grasp the inward connexion which exists between *Regeneration* and atonement (the gift of Regeneration is the reward of the work of Atonement). The Lord allows us a glimpse into the mystery of this connexion in verses 14 and 15, where the description of the salvation wrought out by the love of the great Triune, advances from the work of the Holy Ghost to that of the Son.

Nicodemus is struck dumb. He is made conscious that he is flesh, and this knowledge is in itself an operation of the Spirit, but the mystery of the new spiritual birth, though indeed it now begins to become precious to him, is as yet too wonderful and too high for him, he cannot comprehend it,—should *water* do such great things? "What effect can such a trifling thing as baptizing, or bathing a man with water produce." How can that be! he thinks. His astonished silence implores the Lord to continue His discourse. He meets his thoughts and says:

Ver. 7, 8. "*Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*"

He now says plainly: "*Ye must be born again.*" He here-with excludes Himself, but Nicodemus He expressly includes amongst the number of the children of the flesh, who need regeneration.

But if Nicodemus *must* be born again, there was also ready for him the consolation that what he *must* he *could*, for this is the characteristic grace of the New Testament, that to each

peremptory "Thou shalt," and "Thou must" of the Law, it adds the comfortable "Thou canst," and "Thou wilt" of the Gospel.

But it was a subject of marvel to the old ruler in Israel, *how* these things could be. And truly it is indeed marvellous, but the feeling of the marvel ought not to prevent us from accepting the marvellous grace of regeneration, or from experiencing it to the salvation of our souls. Or do we hesitate to inhale the air which surrounds us, because we cannot comprehend its origin? Do we ward off the breath of the wind, because we know not whence it comes?

Thus does the Lord by this comparison lead Nicodemus, who stands before the marvel of the birth of the Holy Ghost asking questions, away into the department of *Nature's* marvel, whose existence is certain to the senses, but whose moving power is to the understanding a mystery. It is as if he said, "Thou canst indeed perceive the breath of the *wind*, whose sound falls upon thine ear, and thou sayest, It blows, yet thou dost not know where the place is from which it started, nor whither its course leads it (comp. Job xxxviii. 34. Ecces. xi. 5.); well then, when thou hearest the sound of the *Spirit's* breath (and thou dost hear something of it now, Nicodemus), let not the mysteriousness of its coming and acting, hinder thee from acknowledging that it blows, but rather throw open thy soul to its saving power." But did Nicodemus really hear the breathing voice of the Spirit? If he had not heard it, though only as the breath of a gentle wafting, he would have been able to reply to the Lord's allegory thus, "I am sure of the presence of the natural wind, from its sound which I hear; but how shall I be certain of the presence of the spiritual wind?" But no objection of the kind could Nicodemus venture to make, inasmuch as He that conversed with him was the same as says: "The words that I speak unto you, they *are spirit and they are life*" (chap. vi. 63). The Spirit blows where Christ speaks, and where His word is spoken in His name. Whence He comes, from above, from heaven; and whither he goes, upwards, toward heaven—that may be hidden from thee, but His voice thou hearest in its peculiar, unmistakeable power (2 Cor. iv. 2). For to

every man's conscience, the Holy Ghost proves Himself a witness to the words of Christ and of the ambassadors of Christ, and he who is lost, is lost because he is found to be one who *will* fight against God (Acts v. 32, 39), and because he grows hardened against the Holy Ghost, by himself hardening his own heart against Him.

"Thus we have in this comparison a sweet and lovely image, clearly and aptly set forth, showing how it is with this new birth. For as in the wind, the two parts are together: the *blowing*, which is the wind itself, and the sound which we hear without, although the blowing is neither seen nor felt, except through that upon which it blows, so here also the two parts are together, the *word* which is a bodily voice, which we hear, and the *Spirit* working with, and by the word, whose power none sees or feels except him whom the Spirit strikes, and yet is certainly present where the outward word and baptism are in operation, and thus the Spirit in that outward office, allows Himself almost corporeally, as it were, to be seen and grasped, and gives an infallible token where He is to be sought, and where he is working, although the inward power all the while be hidden from our eyes." (Luther.)

The wind bloweth *where it listeth*, not where *thou* listest; God, who bringeth the wind out of His treasures, points out to it its path, and none can turn it aside according to his own will and pleasure. "Who hath gathered the wind in his fists?" In like manner does the living wind, the Holy Ghost, blow *where He listeth*. "That is the power of the Comforter. If no one can restrain the wind from going where it listeth, how much less will the Holy Ghost allow Himself to be hindered in His workings by the natural limits of any earthly power?" (Chrysostom.) It is of free grace that the Holy Ghost fastens upon thee; thou hast not called Him forth out of the treasury of eternal love, neither hath thy worthiness drawn Him to thee; no, but thy misery, thy poverty alone is the magnet which attracts to thee the condescending Friend of souls, that out of His riches, He

may “divide” to thee “*as He will.*” (1 Cor. xii. 11.) (Comp. Augs. Con. Art. 5.) This powerful *will of the Spirit* sweetens that otherwise bitter requirement,—bitter, *to our will* absolutely impossible: “Ye *must* be born again.” The *whence* and *whither* of the holy wind which lays hold of us by the effectual working of His mighty power, is a mystery, the full revelation of which will be part of the delights of eternity. For there, where it shall be revealed what we shall be (1 John iii. 2.),—there we shall know the mind of the Lord, in which the purpose of our deliverance is rooted, and in that light we shall see, and adoringly celebrate, the wonderful ways in which He has continually from time to time followed us, in order to draw us to Himself. “But even here it is a matter for rejoicing, when the holy sound allows itself to be traced, now here, now there, winning souls to itself, “For this also we may draw a similitude from the wind; just as the motion of the air is now violent, now gentle, now not perceived at all, so the regenerated *must* know that the presence and operating power of the Spirit is not measured by the *perception* of spiritual movements.” (Chemnitz.)

“*So is every one that is born of the Spirit,*” says the Saviour. These words are commonly understood to mean, *So is it* with every one that is born of the Spirit; and this rendering is not wrong, because the Holy Ghost is indeed the wondrous wind of which Christ speaks. Yet because, according to verse 6, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit itself, so he who is born of the Spirit has certainly, in a manner, the Spirit within him; therefore, let each one examine himself whether he may take to himself the similitude of the blowing wind which is distinctly heard (2 Cor vi. 9). As *unknown* may we go through the world, as regards the origin of our true life; but never must it be said of us that we are “invisible” believers; no, let our walk, our *being*, give to the world an indisputable proof that the Holy Spirit dwells upon earth in us, as in His temple.

Nicodemus, therefore, feels with what mighty love the Spirit of regeneration is struggling in his soul; he already begins to

feel the first movements of the new birth, and he cries out, no longer in incredulous surprise, but in submissive admiration, although not as yet quite in that humble, self-renouncing astonishment which once drew from the blessed virgin the same words (Luke i. 34) ; he exclaims :

Ver. 9. "*How can these things be ?*"

Then, indeed, did the Saviour's heart leap, which was yearning towards him with such love ! Yet a minute longer does the Lord restrain Himself ; before revealing to him, so far as that is possible *on earth*—the How of sinners' redemption, He would fain draw from him the repentant sigh, "*Alas, how late have I come to know Thee, O Thou exalted Splendour !*"

Ver. 10. "*Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel* [*"THE master ;"* Luther following the Greek] *and knowest not these things ?*"

With the words "*We know,*" Nicodemus had come before Jesus ; in the name likewise of his fellow-rulers he stood there : the Lord, therefore, in these words speaks to the *master of Israel* in him, and by so doing, he aims at the whole class to which this man belonged [comp. verse 11] ; therefore He says, *Art thou the master of Israel ?* To be a teacher of Israel, and yet not to know that which makes Israel to be the true Israel, to be the *people of God*, this is indeed grievous ! Nicodemus, and every teacher of Israel, *might* have known the sort of kingdom that Messiah's kingdom is, namely, that it is a kingdom whose King saves His people from their sins, and imparts to them life in His righteousness, through regeneration of the Spirit, which is without measure in Him ; but they knew not the scriptures nor the power of God ; such passages as Deut. xxx. 5, 14 ; Ezek. xi. 19, 20 ; xviii. 31 ; xxxvi. 26, 27 ; Jer. xxxi. 31-33, and many others, were altogether in vain for them. How must *the teacher of Israel*, now that at length he had become a scholar of the true Teacher, have shrunk back with shame and horror at his former ignorance !

"*Art thou a Master of Israel, and knowest not these things ?*" This question should penetrate deep into the hearts of all

teachers, giving them no rest until, through Grace, they are able to confess : Lord, *I know* that Thou art the Consolation of Israel, and Thy name, in which alone is salvation, I will preach to sinners, that so I may save those that hear me !

But it was not the Prophets alone who, by their testimony, accused the teachers of Israel, who did not know the mystery of the Kingdom ; another witness was now sounding in their ears as distinctly as the blowing of the wind.

Ver. 11. "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.*"

The kingdom of God, which no man can *see* without the eyes which regeneration bestows, the only-begotten Son *has* seen ; and what He says concerning the kingdom of God, He says in the power of the holy "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee !*" which none dare utter but He alone whose *knowledge* of God is one with His consciousness of Himself, and whose testimony has this seal, "The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him,"—and this, too, which is similar to it, "I speak that which I have *seen* with my Father."

We speak, *we* testify, Christ says. Whom does He include with Himself that He says, *We*? Certainly not the Prophets ; not even the greatest, John. The context tells us distinctly who is the Son's fellow-witness. The Holy Ghost it is, whose voice Nicodemus has just heard from Jesus' mouth. As elsewhere the Son includes Himself with the Father and the Spirit, and says, "*We* will come and make our abode" (Chap. xiv. 23), so here He includes Himself—with the Father, indeed, as well, who testifies of the Son (chap. viii. 17, 18), but particularly with the Holy Ghost who, without measure, was given to Him as Prophet, to speak the words of God (ver. 34), and whose testimony, in its origin and divine mission, is the same as the Son's testimony (comp. chap. v. 30 with xvi. 13).

"*And ye receive not our witness.*" He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. This complaint of rejected

love entirely subdues the heart of Nicodemus, and separates him from the miserable number of those whom the Lord addresses in His *ye*—ye receive not Our witness ; and when now the Lord continues :

Ver. 12. “ *If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?*”—

then there can be no doubt that a sigh stirred the soul of Nicodemus, such as that expressed elsewhere, “ Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief !” For only to a soul thirsting for salvation could the Lord have gone on to speak as He does in verse 13, etc.

The things which the Lord calls *earthly*, are those of which He had hitherto been speaking to Nicodemus. But does, then, regeneration, the source to earth-born sinners of heavenly life, belong to *earthly* things ? Yes, it is so to speak, the lowest step in the heavenly ladder which, let down from above, is set upon the earth ; it is in earthly man in the time of his earthly life that it takes place, and it conceals its heavenly power in the earthly element of water, and the sound of the spoken word. On *earth* the water and the spirit bear witness (1 John v. 8). This heavenly thing on earth, the being born again of water and the spirit, will fain be experienced by faith—by *that* faith which is its fruit : in no other way can any one believe in the heavenly things which are above this earth, for it is precisely in the new-birth that their mystery is disclosed.

Among the “ *heavenly* things ” of which He would speak, the Lord especially means the Atonement, that act determined in the heavenly bosom of Eternal Love, and accomplished—though in earth, yet not *in* us, but *for* us who are earthly—by the abased and exalted Son of Man, *who is in Heaven*. If Nicodemus did not believe in the necessity of his regeneration, *i. e.*, if he did not believe that he was a sinner and needed justification to life, how would he be able to believe in *that* necessity of which the Saviour speaks in ver. 14, viz., that the Son of Man *must* be lifted up, in order that the righteousness may be

obtained with which the sinner in regeneration becomes clothed?

But Nicodemus now believed, although in weakness, the first point of the Lord's discourse, the article concerning the "earthly things" of the kingdom of heaven; therefore Jesus is able to "commit Himself unto him," and commences the other point, that concerning the "*heavenly things*."

Ver. 13. "*And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven.*"

"Here He begins to speak of high *heavenly matters*, what is the secret, eternal, unspeakable counsel and will determined with God from all eternity. And He thus completes the *other point* belonging to this discourse on the new birth, viz., how man is justified from sin, becomes a child of God and an inheritor of heavenly eternal life; that is, *whence and why baptism has such power*, and through whom it has been obtained and merited; likewise how it must be received. And He begins by speaking of Himself as the promised Messiah sent of God, the Son of God, of His office and work, of all which the Pharisees understood nothing whatever, and which in their ears sounded far more strange than even what He had hitherto been saying." (Luther.)

Ye will not believe—the Lord in verse 12 had in effect said to the old Adam in Nicodemus and in us—Ye will not believe, if I shall speak to you of heavenly things; *and yet*, thus He now continues, faith is the only way for you to become capable of heavenly things; without faith in Me, ye remain strangers to heavenly existence. In this light the *And* becomes clear to us in the words: "*And no man hath ascended up to heaven.*"

No man; no man by his own power or worthiness; not even Enoch and Elijah, whose *ascent* was a gracious *receiving up*. In these words of Jesus we hear the echo of that prophetic question to which they are likewise the answer: "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?—What is His Name, and what is *His Son's* Name, if thou canst tell?" (Prov. xxx. 4.) Praised

be God, we *can* tell : His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of Man *who came down from heaven*, He hath also *ascended up to heaven*, for *He is in heaven*. The Lord, we observe, does not say : The Son of Man *will* ascend, but He *hath* ascended up to heaven. What manifested itself as completed on the day of His ascension was in potential beginning present in the Son of Man, ever since the moment that the Word became flesh, and flesh became the dwelling of the Glory of the Only-Begotten of the Father, "the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. xv. 47). Since its bodily union with the fulness of Godhead in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, our nature, yes, ours, is a nature ascending towards heaven, as in fact the Saviour expressly adds : "which *is* in Heaven," words from which we cogently infer that in His state of humiliation, though He gave up His heavenly *Form* when He emptied Himself, He yet did not give up His heavenly Essence (Phil. ii. 6). "He who was on earth in respect to the weakness of flesh, the same was also in heaven in respect to the Godhead, which had taken part in our flesh" (Augustine). These words : "Which *is* in Heaven," have precisely the same meaning as those of St. John in chap. i. 18. : "Which *is* in the Bosom of the Father." Where Jesus Christ *is*, there *is* the Father's Bosom, and there is heaven ; as Luther says : "What *is* in God and for God,—that is in heaven."

Thus, then, is the yawning gulf betwixt earth and heaven, betwixt flesh and spirit (ver. 6), filled up in Christ Jesus ; for He is the *Son of Man*, and yet *is in heaven*. Because He descended and has again ascended, therefore to His members who in faith cling on to Him, heaven is open ; and thus, as to the soul of the Christian in the regeneration, on the day of His baptism, so to the body of the Christian in the regeneration, on the day of His resurrection, is there an *ascending into heaven* (Eph. ii. 6) gained and prepared. Augustine says : "Wilt thou fain rise towards heaven, then become a member of Christ ;" and Luther says, in his bold style : "What if I were to say, that not only Christ was in heaven when He was walking upon earth,

but the apostles likewise, and indeed all of us together who are mortal upon earth, in so far as we believe in Christ?" No one mounts towards heaven except he who, in Christ, ascends through faith; and as "no man knoweth the Father save the Son," *and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him*, so also no one ascends towards heaven but only the Son, *and he whom the Son will take with Him*.

Jesus's exaltation, our exaltation! how can that be? Whereby has the Saviour brought it about, that poor sinners, flesh born of flesh, share the same Spirit's blessed life in righteousness in which He Himself *is justified*, as St. Paul says in 1 Tim. iii. 16? Oh! He might indeed have had joy in heaven *without us*, and He might surely have ascended to heaven after having descended, without us; but it was not His *will* without us to be happy in heaven, therefore the heaven in which *He* eternally *was* He has merited for *us*; for the sin which made us unblest and heavenless, He, as Propitiator, took upon Himself, "being made in the likeness of sinful flesh," in order that for us, the Just for the unjust, He might be sacrificed; that for us He might be put to death and condemned according to the flesh; that, on the other hand, for us also in the Spirit He might be quickened (1 Pet. iii. 18). That is what these next words teach us:

Ver. 14, 15. "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*"

"There he shows us how and through what it is that we also may ascend towards heaven—namely, what He has done for us, and how we may be partakers of His benefit; and He herewith discourses concerning the great work of our redemption. For since there was, besides, neither resource nor help to appease God's eternal wrath against sin, and redeem from eternal death, through any creature in heaven or in earth, therefore it behoved the only Son of God to put Himself in our stead, to become a sacrifice for our sin, that thereby God's wrath might be appeased, and payment made. That work is now our salvation and com-

fort, and is *the power which works in baptism, bringing it to pass that we therein become new-born men, and ascend towards heaven.* For that He ascends and descends, and is in heaven—all that belongs to Him—it as yet does not help us; He has the power to do it, and no one can do it after Him. But when He thus speaks: Everything is Mine, and I am up in heaven; but I will not go there thus alone, but will draw up men with Me who otherwise could not ascend; this shall come to pass, that they shall attach themselves to Me. And how? I will have myself crucified, and will rise again; and then they who believe on Me, that I have died for them, these—although of their own strength they can never reach heaven—I will yet draw them thither with Me. Thus He hangs us on to His neck, and carries us whither He Himself goes” (Luther).

But see how the love with which the “master of Israel” is here confronted comes to meet the man’s own mind. He has only to search aright the Scriptures, which from a child he has known, and of which he is the learned interpreter, and there he will find the mystery for the revelation and fulfilment of which Christ has appeared! The brazen serpent which of old Moses lifted up at the command of the Lord in the wilderness, in order that, by fixing their gaze upon it in faith, the people might be made whole, when, as a punishment for their sinful murmurings, they had been bitten by fiery serpents (Numb. xxi. 6-9)—this image of a serpent, this “saving sign,” which already hovered before the eyes of many an Israelite craving salvation (Wisd. xvi. 6, 7), this shall now lead Nicodemus to the knowledge of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. But not Nicodemus alone! Let the consideration of the brazen serpent strengthen and ground us also in the saving knowledge of that cross which men count foolishness.

Mortally wounded by the deadly bite of the serpents, the manna-loathing people is brought to reflection, and confesses, “We have sinned.” They apply to Moses to intercede for them, that the Lord would take away the serpents from them; and the

Lord hears Moses' prayer. Not the people, the death-deserving people, must die, but the serpent is to be killed that it may no more kill. To Israel's victorious banner there is suspended a brazen serpent, exactly similar to the living one; and he who gazed on the image of the dead serpent with repentance and faith in the life-giving word of the Lord, was healed. Must not the thoughts of the children of Israel have then reverted to *that* serpent which Satan made use of when first he led man astray, and whose rooted enmity they had hitherto so painfully and so largely experienced, and even now again when, at his instigation, they allowed themselves to murmur at the manna? Moses at least (we cannot question) thought on this serpent—also on *Him who should bruise the serpent!* The place of sin itself is taken by the humiliating *image* of sin; and he who in faith appropriates to himself the wages which are paid home to the serpent's image, which is death, that man is cured of the serpent's bite, and lives. “*Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*” *Even so*, in the same order of God's blended grace and righteousness, according to the same rule of expiation as the serpent in the wilderness. As in the wilderness for Israel, so for us in life's wilderness, there is but one medicine, and truly a medicine of Divine homœopathy; there, the lifted up image of the serpent; here, the Son of Man lifted up on the cross. Yet here a certain shock is given to our feelings; how do these two agree—the holy Jesus and the serpent's image? O Lord, grant us anew—we say not, to comprehend, but yet in faith to recognise the *Must*; that Must of Thy love, which brings together things which else indeed remain as wide as the poles asunder! The Scriptures testify that Jesus Christ has died, not the death of a saint, but the death of all sinners. Behold Him hanging there, lifted up on the beam of the cross! He is not sin, yet He is indeed *made to be sin* (1 Cor. v. 21); just as the brazen serpent had no poison itself, but was yet an image of the burning, poisonous serpent. “As that serpent was a serpent without venom, an antidote to poisonous serpents themselves,

even so the Son of Man, the Man without sin, is an antidote to the old serpent" (Bengel). Not in sinful flesh, but truly *in the likeness of sinful flesh* (Rom. viii. 3; 1 Pet. ii. 24), bearing our sins in His own body, does Jesus hang on the cross; and by this means there is found a medicine for the serpent bite again which has mortally wounded our nature, whilst in the flesh of the Son of Man sin receives its due, for sin is there condemned. "A serpent is transfixed in order that the serpent may no longer have any power. What means that? Death is transfixed in order that Death may no longer have any power" (Augustine). "There, a serpent wounded and a serpent healed; here, Death brings destruction, and Death brings deliverance from destruction" (Chrysostom). "But why does He take no other sign than just that of the serpents by which they were bitten? for, no doubt, He *might* have taken some other. That is what Paul says in Rom. viii. 3, He has condemned sin with sin, driven out death with death, overcome law with law. How was that? He became a sinner on the cross, with the superscription in the midst of the felons as an arch-felon, suffering the judgment and punishment which a sinner should suffer; He was guiltless, had never done any sin, yet there really fell on Him the name of sinner, and the guilt or punishment of sin, and by having the sin laid upon Him which yet was not His, and by having Himself judged and condemned as a malefactor—by this very means has He abolished sin. Thus He hangs on the cross as an accursed and wicked worm; and yet this dead serpent's form is a healing death and a living medicine to all who, by the bite of sin, are poisoned and tainted unto eternal death, whereby they get eternally healed and saved" (Luther). Yes, through death, Christ takes away the power of him who had the *power of death*—that is, the Devil—and by His *stripes* we are *healed* (Heb. ii. 14; 1 Pet. ii. 24). "Death now is dead, and Life now lives;" and,

"Jesus, who Life art of my life!

Jesus, who Death art of my death!"—

these are the right inscriptions to put over that sign, the most healing for all sinners, the sign of the cross, the shadow of which is found in the wilderness by Seir, but its substance, "full of grace and truth," on Golgotha.

That the expression, "*lifted up*," most immediately points our thoughts to Golgotha, the Evangelist tells us in chap. xii. 32, 33 (comp. chap. viii. 20). But the cross is, in fact, the ladder to heaven. Upon a standard of victory hung the brazen serpent, and the Cross on Golgotha is the triumphant car of the Conqueror of Sin, Death, and Hell (Col. ii. 15). Through the suffering of death, the Captain of our salvation is crowned with glory and honour (Heb. ii. 10). Christ *ought* to have suffered and to enter into His glory. Without the lifting up on the cross, no ascension either for *Him* or for *us*; not for us, because we are flesh; not for Him, because, having come in our flesh, He behoved to endure the crucifixion of our flesh, and in obedience even unto death to be made *perfect* (Heb. v. 9), in order to become the Author of eternal salvation to us.

Thus, then, there is at hand for our sickness a Physician who gives Himself to be the medicine. But whom does this medicine heal? It is capable of healing *everything* that is flesh and is lost, but, in fact, it only heals those who *take* it; those only who, in the same way as Israel looked at the brazen serpent, so fix their eyes upon Him that is crucified—*i.e.*, those who *believe* on Him—believe that His meritorious death is their merited death—"that if *one* died *for all*, then were *all* dead." The might which is wrought by grace in the repentant soul, and which appropriates to itself the death of Christ, which enters into the "fellowship of His sufferings," clothes itself with the "power of His resurrection—that is the *faith* which justifies, which lays hold on *eternal life*—namely, *that* life which, being the true life, is in itself eternal (1 John v. 11-13)—and this life is in the Son of God. We who, through the poison of sin in our flesh, were lost in death, *have* now, by faith in the crucified and exalted Son of Man, eternal life; but our healing unto life,

it must be admitted, takes full effect in no other way than did that of Israel: "If a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived."

Not at once were the fiery serpents exterminated, but for each new wound from their deadly bite there was ever a new cure ready in a glance at the brazen serpent; and its elevation forms a crisis in the history of Israel, from which they go on from victory to victory, amidst joyful songs of triumph. Not at once, either, is sin exterminated in the regenerated; but damning is sin no more to any one who is in Christ Jesus (Rom. viii. 1), because for each new wound from the bite of sin, new healing comes through the glance of faith turned upon the crucified Saviour; He puts into the mouth of His people a new song of the "wars of the Lord," wars which are nothing but victories. "The poison of concupiscence," exclaims Gregory of Nyssa, "can no longer harm me, for daily I take the powerful antidote, Christ the crucified One!" When at length our passage through the wilderness is at an end, and we have arrived at the heavenly Canaan, we shall no longer feel the serpent's bite; but though the wounds will then be perfectly healed, we shall bear in eternity the marks of them on our glorified body, to the praise of the wounds of Jesus by which we have been healed.

"Thus has Christ now made His whole discourse concerning the new birth, or man's righteousness before God, in all its bearings, so far as it is necessary for our salvation to teach us, namely, wherein and through what means regeneration comes, and how it is received, that is, by the Word, by baptism, and by the Spirit who works through baptism; concerning the merit and sacrifice of Christ, for whose sake the grace of God and eternal life is bestowed upon us; concerning faith, by which we appropriate this to ourselves. Therefore so bring together the whole of this discourse, that the end may accord with the beginning. Does any one ask: How does the new birth take place, that the Spirit, through water and the Word, makes the man a child of

God ? The answer is, as Christ here says, thus : If against fears on account of thy sin, thou dost hold and firmly believe the consolation, that Christ the Son of God came down from Heaven on thy account, and for thee was lifted up on the cross, in order that thou mightest not be lost, but mightest have eternal life. This faith is the casket and shrine which contains this treasure of forgiveness of sin and inheritance of eternal life, and through it the man is saved, as Christ says : ‘ *Thy faith hath made thee whole* ’ ” (Luther).

Jesus' Discourse with Nicodemus.

II. GOD'S COUNSEL OF LOVE, AND CONDEMNATION.

CHAPTER III. 16-21.

O Lord, help us to believe in Thy love, and to love Thee in return. Amen.

WE have followed Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus up to where He speaks of the serpent which Moses lifted up, and the Son of Man who in like manner was to be lifted up. There we stopped, as if a "Selah" stood after those words—they were of themselves sufficient to occupy our thoughts during one reading. But let us not, therefore, think, that in that reference the Lord has brought His discourse to a close, and that now follows an addition of the evangelist's own. No, the Lord Himself still goes on speaking, and in thus speaking reveals His glory, a glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father.

From the Lord's very lips did St. John learn that glorious name: "*the only begotten Son.*" It is, indeed, an outpouring of a Saviour's heart which we have before us from vers. 11 to 21, interrupted by no objection from Nicodemus, now a susceptible and eager listener. Upon the mysterious *necessity* of the lifting up on the cross of the Son of Man ("*must,*" ver. 14), God's love to the lost world is here seen casting a bright, illuminating light. "Do not wonder that I must be lifted up that ye may be saved. It is the Father's counsel of love, who has so loved you that for slaves, and, indeed, for unthankful slaves, He gave His Son" (Chrysostom). The Lord's discourse ascends

up from the *Spirit*, who works the new birth, to the *Son*, who, by His atonement, meritoriously procures it, and from both to the Father, from whom the life, applied by the Spirit and mediated by the Son, comes as the original giver. The whole discourse hangs together by a most intimate connexion. What more beautiful passages could the faithful hands of the ancient Church have appointed as texts for preaching on the salutary mystery of the *Trinity* than the two halves of this united whole ? *

Ver. 16. "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*"

This is one of those golden passages with which we have been familiar from our earliest childhood, and, indeed, have heard and repeated a thousand times. It is sweet Gospel, it is "pure milk and honey," ay, it is the real sum and substance of the Gospel. When at Whitsuntide the Church sings, "Come, come, O Heavenly Dove !" then also the Holy Spirit brings this saying as an olive branch plucked in heaven, for a sign that the waters of the flood are abated, and that all enmity is at an end towards the everlasting ark of salvation.

But has this Whitsuntide word really become a treasure of our life, one over which our hearts unceasingly rejoice ? The missionary *Nott* was once reading and explaining this passage to some awakened Tahitians. One of his auditors asked : "Is it then really true that God has so loved you and us that He gave His only begotten Son for us ?" *Nott* stedfastly affirmed that the Gospel which he was preaching was really true ; upon which the Tahitian cried out : "Oh, and thou canst speak of such love without tears !" —himself weeping from shame and joy. May God grant that this Gospel, the sound of which has been familiar to our ears from childhood, may draw from us to-day and every day ever fresh feelings of

* John iii. 1-15 is the Gospel for Trinity Sunday, and do. 16-21 is the Gospel for the preceding Whitsunday.—*Tr.*

adoring amazement, until at length we shall know, no longer “in part” as now, the greatness of that love “which passeth knowledge,” which is the ground on which our salvation is built.

Hear Luther’s praise of this Gospel of the love of God : “This is one of those best and most glorious Gospels which St. John in particular is wont to write, one which were well worthy to be written in letters of gold, not on paper, but if it could be, in the heart ; justly would it be the daily lesson and meditation of every Christian, that so it might visit his thoughts in his prayers, strengthening his faith and quickening his heart to call upon God ; for it is a word which has power to make mourners joyful, to make dead men alive, if the heart only stedfastly believes in it. A heart that does that must be a heart that can here fasten upon more than heaven and earth is able to comprehend.”

God loved : He *is* indeed Love itself ; and when any other being loves, it is only something received out of His Fulness. “It is, indeed, no marvel,” says H. Müller, “that God loves. The light shines, for it is its nature to shine ; the fire burns, for it is its nature to burn. It is no marvel that God loved the *world* which out of love He called into being, in order that creatures might share in His, the Creator’s, blessed Life. But it *is* a marvel that God loved *the* world which was no longer as He had created it, very good, but very bad—corrupted and enslaved by its seducer and its prince, the Devil, full of enmity against God ; lost and forfeited to death on account of sin. It is *this* Love, this “miracle and might of Love,” that the Lord here commends (Rom. v. 8) ; *this* is the Love which has appeared in the incarnate, only-begotten son (1 John iv. 9, 10).

So, in such a manner and in such a measure, God loved the world, *that He gave His only-begotten Son*. Except in the Son whom He gave, God did not love the world ; for His Love is evermore holy. If the world was to be rescued—if from a world abominable to God, it was to become one well-pleasing to God,

it would cost no less a price than the only-begotten Son, God's dear Son, in whom, from eternity, He hath been well pleased. Such was the price necessary, and it was given. God spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all. Both stood before God's sight, the world and the only-begotten Son; the world, full of sin and shame, deserving curse and damnation; the only-begotten Son, the essential Image of the Father, the Brightness of His Glory, the eternal Partner of His Blessedness in Love. Then—even before the foundation of the world (Eph. i. 4), for save from the prepared contingency of Redemption, God would have withheld from creating—then it was determined, in God's infinite free compassion, to *spare* the world and *not* to spare His own Son; to give up His only-begotten Son for an Atonement, and to draw the lost world as redeemed to His Heart. *Either* the world must be eternally lost, *or* the eternal Son must sink Himself to the lost condition of the world, in order that through that finite endurance of its condemnation, which has an infinite value on account of the infiniteness of His Person, He shall become the Cause of its eternal blessedness. In this "*either*" and "*or*," the compassionate Love of God made its decision for the salvation of the lost world (Heb. ii. 9); it endured that the only-begotten Son should descend as *a lost one* into death and hell, in order that the world may *not* be for ever lost, but have eternal life in that Saviour; for He, through His death, has taken away the power of Death, and in His resurrection, brought Life and Immortality to light. This is that "wonderful counsel" of God's "*zeal*" of Love which caused Isaiah to exclaim, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given!"

The Son's *being given* had its perfect accomplishment when He was given up to death (ver. 14); yet it had its commencement already in the first promise which was uttered to the first sinners; and Tauler is right in seeing a ship laden with the Love of God, sailing on through the successive thousands of years until, at length, she drops anchor in the harbour of Bethlehem, and the treasures of her cargo are unloaded on Golgotha.

The world, the *whole* world, God so loved, that He gave His only-begotten Son ; for the whole world, for each individual and lost creature with the world, is this transcendant gift of highest Love intended. Against this comfortable truth Satan rages more violently than against any other. An old servant of God, Michael Beek, relates how that, with these words, he once called out to the soul of a poor demoniac ; immediately the evil spirit answered with a frightful roar, “ The world ! that means only the elect.” May the Lord rebuke thee, Satan, for thus teaching ! No, the world—*that* is the whole human race, all sinners ; so true as that I am a part of the sinful world, so true it is that God also so loved me that He gave up for me His only-begotten Son ! May God give me grace to believe this—ay, to *believe* it ; for, although God will have all men be saved through His Son Jesus Christ (1 Tim. ii. 4), yet He attains the purposes of His Love only with those who *believe* on this only-begotten Son as given up for them ; as Christ says, “ *That all who believe in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*” The same words we have in verse 15, and they are words which a man should many times a-day say to himself, and ever carry them about with him for his *comfort* and for his *warning*. For his *comfort*, because the God who so loved all men and, therefore, also me, that He gave up to be an atoning Sacrifice His only-begotten Son, He also truly *wills*, and that, indeed, earnestly, that all men, therefore that I also, should believe ; and He, accordingly, extends to me the means of His grace, viz., His word and sacraments, through which I can become a believer. For *warning*, because although I cannot *win* eternal life by any “willing” or “running” of my own, I can, nevertheless, by my own fault lose it. Even *because* it is God whose free grace works in us so mightily both to *will* and to *do*, on *that very account* we ought to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. ii. 12, 13). That I resign myself, that the Lord may work in me according to the good pleasure of His will—that *I do not hinder Him*,—this is the only thing His Love ex-

pects from me ; and woe were to me if I refused it to Him that He should be my One and All !

But what is the *belief* concerning which Christ here says, that whosoever *believes in Him* shall not perish, but have eternal life ? Let Luther tell us, “ Here thou seest what *faith* is and means, viz., that it is not a mere bare thought concerning Christ, that He was born of the Virgin, that He suffered, was crucified, that He rose again, ascended into Heaven ; but it is such a heart as *enfolds* and *lays hold on* the Son of God, according to the meaning of these words ; a heart that holds it for a certainty that God gave His only-begotten Son for us, and has thus loved us that we, for His sake, might not perish, but have eternal life. A Christian must come to this, that he give glory to God and the Lord Jesus Christ, that this His Word is *the Truth*, and give the lie to his unbelief. And where this is the case, there the Holy Spirit has already commenced His power and work of faith, and the heart is opened wide enough to lay hold on this treasure, which is greater than heaven and earth ; and though it still goes on (it may be) in great weakness, and though it can never on earth so attain, or so feel its faith, as it ought, but still abides in longing and sighing of the Spirit, which even by the man himself cannot be uttered, the language of his heart being, “ Oh, that it were true ! ” or “ Ah, who could believe it ? ”—yet this sigh and this little spark of faith is of such effect that God counts it as perfect faith, and says, As thou dost believe, so be it done to thee ; and because thou thus believest, thou shalt surely be saved, for this word is a power and a might stronger than any terror of sin or damnation, and this gift is so large that it swallows up sin, death and hell. Oh, if only the heart could remember this word in the time of conflict, neither Devil nor Hell could have power to terrify it, and it must needs exclaim with joy, Of what shall I be afraid ? I have the Son of God given to me by the Father ! and He gives me the word for a witness thereof, which I know to be His word ; *that* will not lie to me any more than He can lie or deceive.”

Luther remembered really these words in the time of conflict, and they were so precious to him that he once called them "the Bible in miniature." When he was dying, and Justus Jonas was wiping the cold sweat from his forehead, he was heard praying thus, "O Heavenly Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Thou God of all consolation, I thank Thee that Thou hast revealed to me Thy dear Son Jesus Christ, in whom I believe, whom I have preached and confessed, whom the wretched Pope and all godless people dishonour, persecute, and blaspheme; I pray Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, let me commit my poor soul into Thy hands! O Heavenly Father, although I now must leave this body and must be torn away from this life, yet I know and am sure that I shall abide for ever with Thee, and that no one can pluck me out of Thy hands,"—and then, as if he were grasping hard after the ground of such certain hope, he repeated aloud this passage (in Latin, as he had learnt it when a child), "*God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that all who believe in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*"

Ver. 17. "*For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through Him might be saved.*"

Pitying Love gave up the Son for the salvation of the world. This the Saviour confirms in the present verse. Reason would have come to another conclusion; it would have reasoned thus: "If God sends His Son into the world, the worldly (the Pharisees said, the *heathen* world) must tremble and be affrighted; for wherefore should the Son of God come, except to condemn the world?" "But fear not," the angel said to the terrified shepherds, "for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a *Saviour*!" To be a Saviour was Jesus sent, not a Judge (1 John iv. 14); He appears meek and lowly in heart, in the humble garb of a servant, and not with flames of fire taking vengeance. The judgment of condemnation to which the world, concluded under sin, was liable, has not been executed *through* the Son, but *on* the Son

(Gal. iii. 13). He was judged for us, that we might not be judged without Him. God's precious oath in Ezek. xxxiii. 11, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live," has this seal: "God sent not His Son into the world to *condemn* the world, but that the world through Him might be *saved*."

Ver. 18. "*He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.*"

He that believeth on Him—he who believeth that the only-begotten Son of God was for him given up to the judgment of death and condemnation—is *not condemned*, for what in him is liable to condemnation, viz., sin, has been already condemned and put to death on the cross of the Surety. "*But he that believeth not*—he who rejects the Saviour who was given for him, either because he will not be a poor sinner, or will remain an obdurate sinner—*he is condemned already*, for the wrath of God and the old curse of the law remaineth on him (ver. 36); he has made his decision for eternal death, by shutting himself out of that everlasting life of blessedness which is only shared in by *faith in the name of the only-begotten Son of God* (comp. 1 John v. 10-12). "In the last judgment there will be no need of any long inquisition, but the sentence will simply be: Because thou believedst not thou art already condemned" (Chemnitz). That which awaits unbelievers at the last day lodges already on earth in the waste and darkness of their souls; only, the feeling of pain not to have the living God for consolation, will be sharpened, and will appear unmixed sorrow, when there shall be no false idol at hand, and no more spells of earth with which the soul may, though only for a few minutes, quench her tormenting thirst. On the other hand, that which will make believers blessed in eternity, is, even in time, their life and their blessedness; only, their joy in God's love through Christ will issue in unmixed bliss, when there shall now be no longer any

other name but the saving name alone of the only-begotten Son of God to possess their happy souls wholly and altogether.

He who believes is saved—he who believes not continues lost. Oh! how is it possible that some do not believe—ay, that it is but a few who do believe? Nicodemus had previously marvelled that a man could be born again; if, indeed, we understand him aright, the marvel with him now has become, how any man could possibly *not* be born again; and his soul inquires: Lord, how happens it that there are found any who believe not, and are therefore already condemned? Jesus answers:

Ver. 19. *“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”*

Light, the true Light, is come into the world, in order to drive out the darkness; on account of the darkness into which men have fallen through sin, they shall not be judged nor condemned: Christ is able and willing to rescue them from the darkness, and to make them partakers of His glory and Light. *But this is the condemnation*, through this the Light that was revealed in order to save, is made a revealer of the righteous judgment of God—viz., that after it came into the world, *men loved darkness rather than light*. Men loved darkness *more* than light; then they did love light a little. Its soul-penetrating loveliness, the “*so*” of God’s compassionate love (God *so* loved the world), did not leave itself wholly without witness in any heart (see chap. i. 5). There is no man from whom Jesus Christ has not at some time or another drawn forth the sigh: “Would that I might be saved through Christ!” Oh, eternity will make this clear, so that amongst the lost there will not be found one who had not felt drawings towards the Light of Life in the midst of the darkness of his spiritual death! But, alas! they loved darkness *more* than light; on account of the cost, because they must hate and forsake darkness, they would rather lose the light. There are two wonders, one from above, the other from the depths of Satan: God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son—and the world so loved dark-

ness that it rejected the only-begotten Son of God who was given for it. This is Israel's history, and that of all the lost, as the Lord contemplates it in its completeness; He therefore speaks of it in the past tense (men *loved* darkness). Entire love to the light produces entire hatred to the darkness; but greater love for darkness than light gives birth at length to perfect hatred of the light, and makes the man like Satan.

Why did men love darkness rather than light? *Because their deeds were evil.* Were not, then, the deeds of *all* men evil? Yes; but the lovers of darkness preferred rather to *retain* their evil works than to experience upon themselves the good works of light; either from a high-minded shame to confess their evil works, or from a thoughtless dislike of forsaking their evil works, they evaded the rebuke and discipline of the light, and if it came near them they hated it. As Augustine beautifully says: "Their works were evil. What means that? Whose works, then, were good? But they *loved*, He says, darkness. It is upon *that* Christ lays the stress. Many *loved* their sins; others *hated* and *confessed* their sins. He who confesses and condemns his sins works already a deed in God. God condemns thy sins; if thou, too, dost condemn them, thou art so far become one with God. There is need that thou hate thine own work, and that thou love God's work in thee. Where thou beginnest to be displeased with what thou hast done, then thy good deeds begin." The Lord Himself says the same:

Ver. 20, 21. "*For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.*"

The lovers of darkness, whose works are evil, *do evil*, the Lord says. They follow evil with diligence; they bestir themselves in evil as in their natural element; it is not alone that they have evil, but evil has them ("he who committeth sin is of the *Devil*"); and they are determined to continue in this service of sin. Therefore they *hate the light* which disturbs them in their dark doings; and as a thief hides his work with night, so evil

doers *come not to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved.* This, then, is the cause why thou wilt not turn to Christ; thou hast and thou lovest deeds which are evil, and thou knowest that Christ will reprove them; therefore thou dost shun to be near Him; therefore thou gettest out of the way of His word and of His witnessing members; for thou wilt not have thine evil deeds reproved, nor thy love of sin taken from thee. Do not, I entreat, in thy reading to-day, pass over this passage until its meaning has become quite clear to thee! Oh, surely thou hast not yet *so* shut thyself out from God, *so* given thyself up to the Devil (2 Cor. iv. 4), that thou shouldest flee from the light which so lovingly woos thee with its beams, and shouldest with fearful decision say, "I hate the light, and I love darkness!"

Having before drawn a simile from the thief, it will be well, in order to prevent misapprehension, to quote an observation from *Brenz*: "Christ does not here speak exactly of gross and flagrant sins, but more properly of the world's highest virtues, its reason, its wisdom, its righteousness. Just as many a sick man will not submit to the doctor's knife and cautery, because he considers himself whole, and thus gets worse and worse; so likewise does the world consider her reason, her wisdom, her righteousness to be whole and good in God's sight, and will not bear the knife and cautery of the Physician Christ, and therefore it becomes more and more darkened against the Light."

Here Nicodemus was self-convicted and smote upon his breast, and what were the "evil deeds" in him that had been to-day reproved by the light? It was the deed of the Pharisees, who loved *their own honour* rather than the honour and glorifying of God in the saving of lost souls. See, man, perhaps thou dost *not* love the dark deeds of the Sadducees, the vain pleasures and the evil gaieties of the world, *more* than Jesus and His light, but is it so, that into thy pharisaical darkness, into the pride of thy conscientiousness, into thy haughtiness, in short, into thy most secret idolatry, thou dost not allow one ray from the face of the crucified One to pierce? Then thou hearest thy

sentence in the words: "*Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.*"

"*But he that doeth truth, cometh to the light.*" The Lord places the doing of *truth* in opposition to the doing of *evil*. He does not say, "He whose deeds are *good* cometh to the light," but "he that doeth *truth* cometh to the light." See, He does not frighten thee, as if thou oughtest not to come because thou hast sins to confess to him. Art thou penitent? Does thou confess, bewail, abhor thy "evil deeds?" Well, then, thou truly *doest truth*, for truth is in them who confess their sin, and is *not* in them who say that they have no sin. A penitent sinner desires nothing more sincerely than to come into the light of God's countenance (Psalm xc. 8), *in order that his works may be made manifest*; he will gladly be put to shame with whatever he has of his own; God alone shall have glory in him, the God of all mercy, in the light of whose grace all our evil deeds become changed into pardoned sins. Everything in conformity with truth which preventing grace has wrought in him, directs a penitent man to Christ, the sinner's Salvation and Peace. Of this Cornelius is a bright example (Acts x. 35). "He who through God's word gets to know his sins, seeks grace and loves Christ, such an one cannot but be made manifest, ay, and he places himself in the light, holds himself before God's word, *gives glory to the truth*, and can well endure that his teaching and his doing and his whole being should be brought to the light, and is bold to set it up in defiance of all devils and men, and without disguise and shame to submit to be seen, heard, tried, and handled" (Luther).

Repentance is, then, the first deed of truth *wrought in God*, according to God's will and in God's strength. I step out of the darkness and come into the light, for God's grace has won; I love the light more than darkness, yea, I desire with all my heart to love the light entirely, and to hate darkness entirely. Thus my heart "doeth truth," for it does the same as God, who hates darkness and loves light, and Himself essentially *is* Light,

(1 John i. 5-7) ; yes, now my life will truly become one work, wrought in God, for God Himself is become my life. I am born of God. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. ii. 20). True—O Lord, thy long-suffering is great!—true, I still have sin, still darkness; but no longer has darkness me; it is my joy to come to the light, to become light, and daily to perform *the* work in God which surely is the sweet kernel and the living substance of all christian works, viz, in faith to contemplate and lay hold on my Lord Jesus Christ, who for my sin was lifted up on the cross, and as my Righteousness now sits at the right hand of God.

And then, when the last making manifest in the light of the judgment-seat of Christ shall fill the world with terror; when the light to which evil-doers would not come, shall come to them with flaming, irresistible splendour—what will then be made manifest in the case of believers? We answer: Jesus Christ will be glorified in His saints and will be admired in all them that believe (2 Thess. i. 10). Christ our Life, our deeds wrought in God, shall be made manifest to the wonder and admiration of the world; and although our accuser the devil were to withstand us and say: "Your deeds were evil," yet shall the wounds of the Lamb, by which we are healed, silence him, and the words: "He that believeth in me, shall not be condemned," will refresh us with unspeakable consolation. Our sins were once made manifest in Christ when He was condemned for us, and in us when through baptism we were planted together with Him in the likeness of His death and through faith entered into the fellowship of His sufferings; therefore we bring no evil works with us into the judgment, the works which follow the blessed who die in the Lord (Rev. xiv. 13) are simply works wrought in God. No one shall ever dig up our sins out of Christ's grave, but like as He will appear glorious, so shall we also appear with Him in glory. This is the happy goal and end of that Christian

conversation which is in conformity with the words now before us: "*He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.*"

Nicodemus had already begun to "do the truth," for he was come to Jesus, the Light. But this first real deed of light of his he did by night, as if it were a deed on account of which he had need to be ashamed in the light of day. Yet it is with a light hand that the Saviour touches this shortcoming, and only that He may gently cover it. It is a gracious recognition of this his very first step in the truth, and at the same time an awakening call upon him to "go on in the Light," that in conclusion He presses upon him. "The Lord Jesus did not urge him to a prompt assent to His words; enough for Him was Nicodemus's silence and his lowly acceptance of such a seed. For its taking root within, and its bringing forth fruit, He allows time" (Rieger). And Nicodemus, we know, became a hero in "doing the truth," and therefore in coming to the light. When Christ hung on the cross, a lifeless corpse, then there revived in Nicodemus's heart the remembrance of this night's sermon, "Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up—so God loved the world," and lo! his concealment becomes insufferable to him, his love towards the Light of his life breaks out into clear light, and joyfully he brings his honour as ruler, that he may offer it up at the foot of the shameful cross. Does not thy heart, dear Christian, long to accompany Nicodemus? Like him, thou wast in secret with Jesus; that is well—but shall it not be made manifest what God has wrought in thee? Wilt thou not speak, even though it should bring to thee shame as surely as it did to Nicodemus at Jesus's burial?

Augustine relates of the Roman orator Victorinus (in the time of Julian) that he opened his heart to an old Christian called Simplicianus, and said to him, "You may rely upon it, I shall die a Christian." Whereupon the old man said, "Then God grant that I see thee in our church to-morrow!" Victorinus answered, "What do I hear? do your church walls then make

a Christian? I can surely be a Christian of my own self, even if I remain at home." The fact was, he could not bear to offend his noble heathen relatives. When, however, Simplicianus brought before him these words of the Lord Jesus: "He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven," his mind was struck: soon after he appeared in the congregation, and made public confession of his faith.

The Bridegroom and the Friend of the Bride.

CHAPTER III. 22-36.

Lord Jesus, Thou Bridegroom of our souls, do Thou give unto us both the joy of Thy friend and the blessedness of Thy bride. Amen.

ST. JOHN has begun to display before the eyes of his readers the glory of the only-begotten Son, as that glory was indelibly imprinted in his loving spirit, and as the Holy Ghost, by His promised "bringing to remembrance" (chap. xiv. 26), daily refreshed within him the lineaments of the Lord's image. And it is in particular on two manifestations of the Lord's glory that the gaze of the Evangelist is now especially rivetted : the first was that which fell to the share of Nicodemus ; and the other, to the Samaritan woman (chap. iv). In both cases Jesus "committed Himself" (chap. ii. 24) to souls willing and ready to receive Him. He reveals Himself to them as God's Gift of Love unto eternal life (chap. iii. 16 ; iv. 10). But between these two manifestations the Evangelist interposes the "dying swan's note" of John the Baptist, his latest testimony to the glory of the Son of God. We already know with what joyful gratitude the Baptist's former disciple remembers the holy Prophet, for his finger it was that first pointed out to him the Lamb of God and the Bridegroom of his soul. This remembrance now irresistibly leads him to impart the testimony which more clearly than any he had previously given, mirrors forth his meek and lowly soul ; and which, for that very reason, includes him in the number of

those chosen ones of whom the Evangelist says, "*We saw His Glory*" (chap. i. 14).

Ver. 22. "*After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judea; and there He tarried with them and baptised.*"

The Lord was, no doubt, returning from Jerusalem homewards towards Galilee. On His way He proceeded with His disciples into the land of Judea, in order to tarry for a time amongst those scenes which had once been the dwelling-places of the Patriarchs. Here He *baptised* (chap. iv. 1, 2), *i.e.*, through the instrumentality of His disciples. Baptism was not first instituted by the command in Matt. xxviii., but only appointed as a general blessing for *all nations*. In answer to the question, why Christ should not Himself baptise, but only through His disciples, the Fathers say, "It was because He would let *all* Christians have the common consolation of knowing that *their* baptism, administered by the hands of His servants, is a baptism of which it may be said with truth, *Christ was baptising.*"

Ver. 23, 24. "*And John also was baptising in Ænon, near to Salim, because there was much water there; and they came and were baptised. For John was not yet cast into prison.*"

John had left Bethany in the valley of the Jordan, which was where he usually baptised (chap. i. 28), and had retired into the vicinity of his native place, to a certain quiet spot whither only souls anxiously inquiring after the truth would be likely to follow him. Up to the very time of his imprisonment, John continued to work; even until God who had called him at length brought to him his evening hour of rest. Therefore his imprisonment did not commence immediately after the baptism of Jesus, as we might perhaps have gathered from the other Evangelists, but some time subsequently. It is true that the great object of his mission—that through him Jesus should be made manifest to Israel—had been now fulfilled; but to his Lord, who was now walking in Israel's midst, whom he had recognised while baptising, it was still his function to bear witness, and to make known his now "fulfilled joy" to the bride whom, as the

Bridegroom's friend, he had sued for Him. If, as some think, his baptism differed in its *nature* from Christian baptism, he must then have discontinued it when Christ's disciples commenced baptising—or, might we venture to say that Christ's disciples had first baptised with the baptism of John, and only afterwards with the baptism of Christ as a better one? No; Christ, through His disciples, can certainly never have baptised with any other baptism than that of which He said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of *water and of the Spirit*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Christ, indeed, still veiled the operations of the Spirit of fire (Luke iii. 16) which wrought in His baptism, under the same image of water with which John also baptised; but, blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Him (Luke vii. 23).

Ver. 25, 26. "*Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and a Jew* about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptiseth, and all men come to Him.*"

We may suppose that the disciples of John, while conversing with a "Jew," a pharisaical gainsayer of the baptism of repentance, had been lauding this purification as the only saving one, and that the Jew had answered, "If, then, your Master's purification is the true one which has been promised by the prophets, why does the Galilean Jesus baptise with a new baptism?" And the disciples of John were really confused in their notions respecting their Master and his baptism. What kind of a Messiah is Jesus, if He baptises just as John does; and, on the other hand, what kind of a baptiser is John if Jesus' baptism is a new one? Such was their perplexity. The fact is, they could not hitherto have rightly understood John's testimony concerning Jesus, although they had not forgotten it, for, surely, if they had, they would no longer have remained in Salim; they would have been found in conjunction with Jesus.

* The recent editors of the Greek original concur in this reading, which Luther's translation follows, in preference to the reading: *the Jews*, which our authorised version renders.—*Tr.*

Ver. 27. "*John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.*"

He sees the temptation which lay for himself in the half-jealous, half-doubting complaint of his weak disciples ; but he also beats it down in a spirit of calm and sober humility. What he was, viz., the Messenger of the Christ, he had not taken to himself, but it was given to him from heaven ; what he was *not*, viz., the Christ, he would not take to himself to be ; but he joyfully acknowledged Him to be the Christ to whom it was given from heaven (Heb. v. 4, 5). Accordingly, the following verse is the application of the general rule, "*A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.*"

Ver. 28. "*Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him.*"

Before Him who was with me beyond Jordan, to whom I bare witness (ver. 26), and of whom I still bear witness with joy, that this is the Son of God (chap. i. 34). What I told you is now coming to pass ; the consolation of my baptism is actually present, not in *me*, but in Him.—He then in the following verses continues to bear witness, first employing an image which is of singular beauty to set forth what was given to *him* from heaven, and what to *the Christ*.

Ver. 29. "*He that hath the bride is the bridegroom : but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy, therefore, is fulfilled.*"

He that hath the bride is the bridegroom. There is only *One* who is the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ ; and He has only *one* bride, viz., His Church. To be able to *have* her as His bride, He, the eternal Word, became Flesh ; and, in order that she might be able to have Him for her Bridegroom, He gave Himself for her, and sanctified her to Himself, cleansed her "through the washing of water by the word" (Eph. v. 26 ; comp. Isa. iv. 4) ; this, however, He did by means of His friend, who sued

her for Him and conducted her to Him.* Just as a bridegroom has a friend through whom he makes his suit known to her whom he has chosen to be his bride, whose part it is to incline her heart towards him, and, when won, to conduct her to him : so in like manner, the heavenly Bridegroom had a friend in John who, by word and baptism, sued the bride for Him, and who then, all adorned, led her to Him—"up out of the *wilderness*" (Cant. iii. 6 ; comp. Acts xiii. 24, 25). No treacherous thought ever once entered into the friend's heart, as if he himself might be the Bridegroom, and not the friend of the Bridegroom only ; that he himself might *have* the Bride, and not merely lead her to another ; no, his only longing was to hear the Bridegroom's voice (Psa. xlv. 11 ; Cant. ii. 8), and when he heard it—when the heavenly Solomon approached with the flying eagerness of love, leaping over every hill of separation between God and His people—then he greatly rejoiced ; he desired nothing further, his joy was fulfilled—the joy which had been the blissful emotion of his life from his mother's womb (Luke i. 41), from the time of the Virgin's salutation to his mother, announcing to her the marriage of God and humanity, in the womb of the blessed Virgin.

"It is a beautiful name which is here given to the ministers of the Word, that they are called *friends of the Bridegroom*. For, as a bridegroom employs confidential friends to sue for him his bride, so also does Christ employ His servants who shall propose to poor sinners spiritual betrothal with Him, and by discovering their sins and setting before them His atonement, shall win them unto Him, in order that thus the chosen bride, through the office of the Word and of the sacraments, may be conducted to the Bridegroom. And even after the bride is betrothed to the Bridegroom, it is the Bridegroom's will that His friends should be present at the marriage, that she who is

* The reader must bear in mind the seclusion from each other in which, in oriental countries, the sexes live before marriage, and which necessitates the intervention of a third party to contract the marriage.—*Tr.*

espoused to one husband, may be presented as a chaste virgin, and may maintain her conjugal fidelity (2 Cor. xi. 2). At all times does the Son of God thus employ His servants' labours in the Church, whether it be to conduct the bride to the Bridegroom, or to see that the betrothed keep her fidelity, or if she break it, to bring her back again to the marriage band (Jer. iii. 1): and those who do this are friends of the Bridegroom. This is a delicate figure, which serves vividly to set forth the office of the New Testament, and also to remind ministers of the Gospel of their calling, viz., that it should be their highest joy to win many souls to Christ, and to lead them to Him. For he who is indeed the friend of the Bridegroom can experience no greater joy than that of hearing the Bridegroom's voice as He receives His bride and unites her for ever with Himself in fellowship in all that He has." (Chemnitz.)

Before we listen further to what the friend of the Bridegroom says and to the testimony of His holy and unqualified joy, let us tarry yet awhile with the Bridegroom and the bride while the sweet utterances ring in our ears, which in various parts of Scripture set forth the great bridal mystery between Christ and His Church, and which in the Canticles are blended into one sustained spiritual song (Eph. v. ; Ezek. xxvi. ; Isa. liv. 5 ; lxii. 5 ; Ps. xlv. ; Rev. xxi). As a man leaves his father and mother that he may join himself to his wife, so Christ surrenders His heavenly glory that He may become one flesh with His Church: He *did* it when He became Flesh, and He *does* it still in the Lord's Supper, until He comes fully to satisfy the bride's longing for Him. Oh, what will it be when on that day the cry is made : "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh !"

Ver. 30. "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

When the joy of the Bridegroom's friend was fulfilled, his work, also, was accomplished. As Simeon, when his eyes had seen the Saviour, had no other desire on earth, so it was with John after he had heard the Bridegroom's voice. Like the morning-red which pales before the rising sun, so he must

decrease, but Christ must increase ; and he rejoiced that his dignity lessened that so Christ might be exalted (Matt. xi. 11). Every soul who left him for Christ, and entered into the kingdom of the new covenant, only contributed to the fulfilment of his joy.

When the Lord vouchsafes His blessing to the words of His servants, so that sinners come to repentance and believe, these babes in Christ cling at first to the person of their minister with a love which approaches but too nearly to what is forbidden in the words: "Put not your trust in man!" But the more perfectly Christ is formed within them through the Word, the more free from all admixture of fleshly savour will be the love which they will bear to their most beloved friends, and even to their father in Christ. To vain preachers this often gives pain ; they can easily discover pride in others, whilst their own remains hidden from them. Well is it for the preacher who, under such circumstances, can honestly say with John, "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*" Such an one is a true friend of the Bridegroom. Not without meaning does the Church celebrate the birthday of John the Baptist at the time when the days begin to *decrease*, in contrast to the day of Christ's birth, when the days begin to *increase*.

John now proceeds to describe the heavenly Bridegroom, and it is easy to perceive that he must be indeed a friend of the Bridegroom, who was deemed worthy thus to bear witness of Him. He clearly sees and joyfully declares the reason why Christ must increase, and that it is His increase alone that is the *salvation* of the world.

Vers. 31, 32. "*He that cometh from heaven is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth; he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard that he testifieth, and no man receiveth his testimony.*"

The disciples of John had felt themselves aggrieved, and could not understand it that He who had been baptised by their Master should now throw His baptiser into the shade ; to this

John with great force opposes, "*He that cometh from heaven is above all.*" The glory of Jesus *must* grow and break forth into view, for He stands there as one come from heaven; and, therefore, as He was above *all* which was created through Him, so likewise above *all* who have been born of woman, even above the greatest of the prophets. Make no mistake in reference to Him, John says: He was indeed with me beyond Jordan, and I baptised Him with the baptism of repentance; yet He is not a sinner, but the Bridegroom of sinful humanity, who is come from above and has become flesh that He may purify men who are flesh, and exalt them to be His bride. Only listen to the Bridegroom's *voice!* Should you not perceive that it is from above? "*He that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth.*"

Of Jesus it is said: *He comes from heaven; of every other: he is of the earth.* Every son of earth bears the image of the earthly (comp. v. 6: That which is *born* of the flesh *is* flesh), and although he is moved by the Holy Ghost, and speaks heavenly mysteries (2 Pet. i. 21), yet his discourse is water drawn in an earthly vessel. The prophets, "in whom the Spirit of Christ was," *inquired and searched diligently* into the blessedness which they promised should afterwards come; gazing up from earth toward heaven they waited for the salvation, the approach of which was revealed to them; yet even the holy apostles who preached the Gospel of the salvation which was now revealed through the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven (1 Pet. i. 12)—even they, because they *sprung* from the earth and were *earthly*, *spoke* of the earth in *this* sense, viz., that though what they spoke they *received* from heaven, yet it was what they themselves *learnt* as earthly witnesses of heavenly things (1 John v. 8). In all Christ's witnesses, both of the Old and New Testament, the humbling consciousness is ever present, that they are *of the earth*, and that, therefore, the heavenly thing which they speak "proceeds not from the enlightened man, but from the enlightening God" (Augustine). (Comp. in particular many expres-

sions of St. Paul, as Rom. xv. 18 ; 1 Cor. ii. 12 ; 2 Cor. ii. 17 ; iii. 5 ; xiii. 3 ; 1 Cor. vii. 10). Very different, however, is the voice of the Bridegroom who comes from heaven ! His voice is above all things high exalted ; it is the sole rule and standard of all earthly voices ; for "*what He hath seen and heard, that He testifieth.*" As He Himself said to Nicodemus : " Verily, verily, I say unto you, We *speak* that we do *know* , and *testify* that we have *seen* (ver. 11). To Him nothing *becomes* revealed, but He Himself *is* the Revealer of all mysteries belonging to His own place, the heavenly Witness of heavenly things ; He is Himself the Light to which He testifieth (chap. i. 8, 9).

" *And no man receiveth His testimony.*" John's disciples had said : " And *all men* come to Him ;" but John answers them by lamenting : " *No man* receiveth His testimony." The faith which Israel owed to the testimony of Jesus is not to be found. So ardently does the friend of the Bridegroom long that *all* should hear with a bride's eagerness the voice of that Bridegroom, that the little band of believers vanishes from his sight, it is so obscured by the great mass of the people who thrust their King and Bridegroom from them. With similar feelings of pain St. Paul mourns over Israel in Rom. ix—xi ; and, indeed, our Evangelist says at the very commencement : He came unto His *own* , and *His own* received *Him not* ." But as then the Evangelist consoles himself by adding : "*As many* as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God," so here the Baptist adds :

Ver. 33. "*He that hath received His testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.*"

He who in faith receives the witness of Jesus is a living letter of acknowledgment testifying to the truthfulness of God who gave this Jesus to be the Life of sinners ; the believer's joy and perfect satisfaction is, so to speak, a seal of confirmation to that great charter of God which God has set before the world in the person of His only-begotten Son, in whom all His promises are yea and Amen (2 Cor. i. 20). " He feels it as a seal impressed on His

heart, viz, the faith that God is true, and he confesses and testifies it openly, as He says in chap. vii. 17." (Luther).

This is the highest honour which God can bestow upon us poor men, viz., that he deems us worthy of honouring Him by becoming a seal to His Truth (Rom. iv. 20). But just so much the greater and more damnable also is *their* guilt who do not receive the witness of Jesus, and who thus make God a liar (1 John v. 10). "It is not without weighty cause that the Baptist here uses the expression, "*Set to his seal*," which elsewhere, in the article of justification, is almost always spoken of *God*, but here it is said of the *believer*. The fact is, in justification, the covenant of a good conscience before God is contained, by virtue of which the conscience firmly relies upon this, that God is gracious to us. On the one hand, God seals the covenant with His sacraments and His Holy Spirit; but on the other, Faith seals this covenant in the conscience, and the believer confirms it, affirming that he has peace in His assurance, and that he will fain continue therein even to the end." (Chemnitz).—He who receives the testimony of Jesus hath set to his seal *that God is true*.

Ver. 34. "*For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God : for God giveth not the spirit by measure unto Him.*"

Because the words of Christ are the words of God, therefore he who receives the witness of Christ sets his seal to God's Truth (chap. xii. 44). Being in a peculiar manner, like to none else, *sent from God*, namely, from the Father's bosom in heaven, the only begotten Son who *is* in the Father's bosom (chap. i. 18), also in a peculiar manner, as none else does, *speaks God's word*, properly *the words of God*, that is, *all* the words that are present in God's compassionate Love, and that are to be revealed to us for our salvation. Some things of those words of God which were to be revealed, a *measured* portion, was spoken by the Prophets, and especially by John; but He only can utter forth the whole fulness of the words of God, who is Himself the eternal Word, and to whom, as being, in respect to His human

nature, a Prophet, *the Holy Spirit*, not, as to His earthly fore-runners, by *measure*, but in perfect fulness, has been given, and without intermission is being given ; so that in Him are hid *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. ii. 3). The Baptist sees before him the Saviour as He was with him beyond Jordan, in that form which had left so deep an impression in his soul : “ I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, *and it abode upon Him*” (chap. i. 33). It was for this very reason, because the Spirit *abode* upon Him, that the expression runs : God *giveth*, not merely, *has* given. Not by measure does God give the Spirit : this is true of Jesus Christ, the Anointed One ; but it is also true of all Christians who are anointed with the Spirit according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Eph. iv. 7). Since the time that the Spirit took up His abode amongst us, within the Person of Jesus Christ, He has streamed forth from the Head upon the members of the body, shed abroad *abundantly* out of the fulness of Christ (Tit. iii. 6).

John’s testimony concerning Him who “ must increase ” is, so to speak, a ladder by which we mount from one degree of glory to another. Only observe the names which he gives to Christ, and by which he distinguishes Him from himself who is “ a man ” (ver. 27). He calls Him the *Bridegroom*—*Him that cometh from above, from heaven*—*Him who has been sent from God*, anointed with the *Holy Ghost without measure*. But at length he calls Him by the highest name of all :

Ver. 35. “ *The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand.* ”

That name John had heard in the Voice from the Father, which, while the Holy Ghost was descending on the baptized Jesus, called down from heaven, “ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. ” Being baptized for *all* as the Lamb who bears the sin of the *world*, the Son of the Father, the Beloved One, becomes the Mediator between God and man ; the love which eternally rests on the Son stretches itself forth towards the lost world which has been placed in the redeeming

power and hand of the Son (chap. xvii. 2), in order that "the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and that He may reign for ever and ever" (Rev. xi. 15). *All things hath the Father given into His hand*; all that was to be redeemed, and likewise all the happiness prepared for the redeemed. "Not only *life* appertains to Christ, but the *bride* also" (Bengel). The Father's love has withheld nothing from the Son; what of life and blessedness the Father has, *that* the Son has also, and *that* likewise, in the Son who is Jesus, have those who are redeemed by His blood, the Bridegroom's beloved bride. We sinners do not deserve the love of God, but the beloved Son deserves that for His sake we too should be loved. Yes, *to us belongs* all that the Father has given to the Son whom He loves; *and we have it, if only we believe.*

Ver. 36. "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*"

The Son *has* life (v. 26), yea, Himself *is* life (xiv. 6); therefore *he that believeth on the Son*, he who possesses the Son to be his life-property, so that through faith He dwells in his heart (Eph. iii. 17), such an one, though in the midst of the body of death, *has eternal life.*

Thou wouldest fain *become happy*, thou sayest. But wouldest thou not become so until after thy death? Be not deceived! There is but one blessedness, but one life, because there is but one Jesus Christ both *here* and *there*. Believe, and thou *art* saved; thou *hast* life, and shalt never see death (chap. viii. 21). He who *has* not life now in *faith*, his eyes never *will* see it. Would that all Christians really knew these three things! First, what they *were* without Christ—*lost*; what they *are* through Christ *for* them—*righteous*; what they *become* through Christ *in* them—*holy*. For then should we have peace, and, as blessed possessors of eternal life, we should await, with longing indeed, but without disquiet, the appearance of that which as yet we are not—to be *crowned* with the crown of manifested glory.

If the Father has given all things into His Son's hand, no one *will see life* who refuses to receive it from the hand of His Son. No one, indeed, can pluck us from His hand (chap. x. 28), neither the devil, nor the world, nor yet our accusing consciences; but *thou thyself* canst pluck thine own soul's life out of the hand of this Jesus, if thou dost *not believe in Him*. The Greek expression for *not believing* is very forcible; it means literally, *to refuse obedience*. Those who believe not are *rebels* against their rightful Saviour.

"*The wrath of God abideth on him.*" The unbeliever disdains to experience God's *love*—that love with which the Father loves the Son, and in the Son all the redeemed; therefore the *wrath* of God "abideth on him"—the wrath which rests on all that is ungodly, which by God's holiness is abhorred and thrust away. The wrath of God does not now first *come* on him, but *remains* on him, who being the child, by nature, of wrath, despises to become by grace, through Christ, a child of love. The unbeliever *is* condemned (ver. 18). Yes, the old wrath of God *remains* on those heirs of Adam's sin and curse who, for their part, put to shame redemption through the Son of God; but its fire burns with a new, tormenting glow, even with "flames of vengeance, on those who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. i. 8). Sodom and Gomorrah will find God's wrath more tolerable than that town on which the wrath of God *remained*, because they bid away from them the message: "God so *loved* the world" (Matt. x. 15; comp. John xv. 22).

Dost thou hear with what pressing solicitations of loving violence the friend of the Bridegroom seeks to draw the bride? His joy was great when his disciples, to whom he thus testified of the Son of God, left Aënon and hastened to Jesus; when they were greeted with the Bridegroom's voice; and, by their faith and confession, set to their seal that God was true—true even in *that* witness of His Son which He had put into John the Baptist's mouth; yes, then "his joy was fulfilled."

Jesus' Discourse with the Woman of Samaria.

CHAPTER IV. 1-26.

O Lord, Thou art athirst for our life, we therefore present our souls to Thee; do Thou give us living water, we humbly beseech Thee. Amen.

WE have already directed our attention to that twofold manifestation of the Lord's glory, which we find in His two discourses with Nicodemus and with the woman of Samaria. In the one, a beam from the Sun of Life shines in upon *Israel*; in the other, upon the *heathen world*. In the one we see Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, representing the chosen people, from whose midst salvation has sprung up, and this salvation he is summoned in faith to receive; in the other we behold the Samaritan, a Gentile woman, as the representative of the nations, to whom the salvation comes from the Jews, and she is summoned to make herself a partaker in this salvation by drinking of the true Jacob's well—that is, of the fulness of life which has appeared in Christ, the promised Seed of Abraham. Whilst the Bridegroom (whose bride is to be purified for Him, not out of Israel alone, but out of the *world*) is suing for the soul of this Samaritan woman, He has, all the while, that whole *harvest* before His longing eyes, which, out of this first sowing, was to accrue to His seeking love (ver. 35). Let us bear this in mind, because it will help us not a little in the right understanding of this marvellous discourse in its several parts. “This narrative,

in which the Lord holds so kind and comforting a discourse with the Samaritan woman, and talks with her on the most lofty of all subjects—viz., who He is, and what was to be expected from Him,” Luther considers as the prelude to the acceptance of the Gentiles, and, at the same time, to the rejection of the Jews. He thus writes: “Now the Lord well knew how the matter stood with His people, that the best and the greater part of them placed their confidence in being children of the Patriarchs, the circumcised holy ones; in short, in their being the people of God; and thus they held it as certain that they were righteous and holy before God, and on that account felt no longing for a Saviour who should deliver them from sin and death; rather, the Messiah whom they desired was one who should make them rich and prosperous here upon earth. For proud, self-sufficient saints such as these, Christ was not come; and therefore this narrative is, as it were, a prelude to the Lord’s abandonment of His people, and His acceptance of the Gentiles, who had no righteousness and no service of God, no law which they could boast of, but who had nothing for it but to confess themselves the ungodly and idolatrous people which they were.”

Vers. 1-3. “*When therefore the Lord knew how the pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptised more disciples than John, (though Jesus Himself baptised not, but His disciples,) He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee.*”

The Lord—here for the first time St John thus speaks of Jesus. Let this name, *the Lord*, recall to our remembrance all that is written concerning His glory in the three first chapters!

Alarmed at the “blessed stir” that this Jesus, who had been baptised by John, was causing in Judea, the Pharisees delivered up the Baptist to Herod, who put him in prison (Matt. iv. 12). They soon, however, saw that their plan had not succeeded; for Jesus was now beginning to be far more dangerous to them than John had been. The Lord *knew* that the Pharisees meditated dealing with Him as they had with John the Baptist. He might, indeed, have restrained them by the scourge of His

righteous anger, but that was not the path which His Father marked out for Him upon earth. Although He was *the Lord*, He evaded the snares of men in a way which at once betokened His lowliness, and the “gentleness” with which He spared His enemies. He left *Judea*, where they did not receive His witness, and went again towards Galilee, in order to refresh that country with a second proof of His condescension. Henceforth it was as a “Galilean prophet” that He would again visit Judea. “If Christ had immediately on the spot dashed the schemes of His adversaries by the display of His omnipotence, and had bid all suffering away from Him, what hope or consolation could we then have derived from the persecutions of Christ, when in extreme weakness we appear to be delivered over to the power of our enemies and utterly abandoned? Then would our consciences say: See the unlikeness between the power shown in Christ’s persecutions and the powerlessness in thine! This shows thee that thou art not like to the image of the Son of God. But Christ in suffering persecution emptied Himself of His power; He stooped down into the deepest lowliness, in order that we may be able, with His weakness, to comfort ourselves to our strength (2 Cor. xiii. 4).” (Chemnitz.)

Ver. 4. “*And He must needs go through Samaria.*”

He *must*. Not only because Samaria lay between Judea and Galilee, but He *must* also in *that* sense in which He said He *must* abide at Zaccheus’s house (Luke xix. 5). This day salvation was to come to Samaria; and whilst people generally were fain to go all the way round by Perea, merely to avoid Samaria, so much was it hated, that Friend of all that is lost hastened with joy to journey to Galilee by the direct way *through Samaria*.

Ver. 5. “*Then cometh He to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.*”

The town which John here mentions as *Sychar* is called elsewhere *Sichem*. Why does He call what surely is rightly named *Sichem* by the name of *Sychar*? *Sychar* means *lie*.

Now, though the Samaritans said: "We serve the true God," yet they did not at all know the true God, the God of Israel (v. 22). Their worship was vain, and vain was also their boast of dwelling in Jacob's *Sichem*. This is what is meant by the name of *Sychar*, which is changed from *Sichem*, just as in Hosea (iv. 15), *Bethel* (the house of God) is changed into *Bethaven* (the house of sin); and again in 1 Chron. ii. 7, *Achan* is changed into *Achar* (troubler).

It was here, at *Sychar*, that Abraham once dwelt, and afterwards Jacob, who sanctified the spot by building there an altar (Gen. xxxiii. 36); and there also was the piece of ground which he bequeathed to his favourite son Joseph in preference to his brethren (Gen. xlviii. 22); and it was here that Joseph's bones were buried (Josh. xxiv. 22). Thus, this was a place fitted to remind them of the faith of their fathers; and the Lord, upon whom Jacob's and Joseph's gaze was fixed in their elinging to the land of Promise—He is now coming to glorify this little town of Joseph by His own gracious presence.

Ver. 6. "*Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.*"

Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough *by a well* (Gen. xlix. 22; comp. Gen. xli. 52). In the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom Joseph was the type, this blessing of Jacob was to issue in its final fulfilment. When He who "must *increase*," like Joseph, even to a throne, visited Jacob's well in the goodly inheritance of Joseph, then the crown of blessing flourished upon Israel, even as Moses had seen it from afar, when he prophesied: "The *fountain of Jacob* shall be upon a land of eorn and wine, also his heavens shall drop down dew. *Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency!*" (Deut. xxxiii. 28, 29). Samaria was now to inherit the blessing of the

patriarchs—she was to become His in whom the true Joseph appeared, despised of his brethren, and yet become their deliverer.

Tired with His journey, Jesus seated Himself *thus*, with the manner of one weary, upon the well. Behold, then, thou hast a Saviour who also knows what it is to feel weary! Observe *that* for thy own behoof, if thou art poor as He was, and canst not travel like the rich. Art thou tired and footsore, and hardly able to go any further? then with simple boldness appeal to thy Saviour, on the ground of this His weariness by Jacob's well.

Again is the hour of the day imprinted on St. John's memory : *it was about the sixth hour, i.e., just mid-day*, so that Jesus had probably gone about three hours' journey from Judea.

Vers. 7, 8. "*There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus saith unto her : Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away into the city to buy meat).*"

Jesus *must needs* go through Samaria, and the Samaritan woman *must needs* come about the sixth hour to draw water. She comes to the well, and sees Jesus sitting there ; but she gives Him no word of salutation, nor addresses Him. Jesus then speaks to her, and, as a suppliant, petitions ; He says : *Give me to drink.* Wearied from His journey as He is, the Lord is thirsty. And He who can command the clouds to pour down rain, and who once gave Israel to drink in the wilderness, now disdains not humbly to beg for a draught of water from this woman. The disciples would gladly have served their Lord, as St. John indicates by the parenthesis which he inserts after the mention of his Master being athirst ; *but they were gone away into the city to buy meat* for the mid-day meal. In the meantime, Jesus is hungering for another kind of food (ver. 32). His feeling of bodily hunger and thirst becomes the image of the longing of His soul : He hungered and thirsted for the accomplishment of that work which the Father's love had given into the hand of the Son, for the salvation of lost sinners. It is this woman's *soul* that He longs for when He says : *Give me*

to drink. — When He is bearing to drink it is the woman's turn to drink. He thirsts! — As He sees this woman drawing water from Jacob's well He longs to be refreshed by the drink of the Samaritan. Samaritan sons and daughters shall come and draw from Him who is the living Jacob's well water which He then will give drink as a thank-offering for their redeemed life. The request *Give me to drink!* expresses the same longing as is expressed aloud in their cry on the cross: *I thirst* — concerning which Gregory Nazianzen beautifully observed: "He thirsted for our thirst." In the narrative the desire of the heavenly Son of man to drink goes hand in hand with the desire of the sufferer of Zion to give Him to drink. After the feeling of earthly thirst has been the occasion of making the request to the Samaritan woman and now approaching her for the satisfying of His heavenly thirst for her salvation the water drawn from Jacob's well as symbol is soon forgotten. We bear no more of His drinking out of the woman's water-pot after He had refreshed His thirsting Samaritan at the fountain of her faith. Then we clearly see which the water was which Jesus was concerned about. — Our blessed Lord was concerned about something else. It was not alone His body that hungered and thirsted although we may believe that after His journey He was tired and hungry and thirsty. But much more for His spirit long for the redemption of poor, condemned sinners for whom a Father in His love sent His Son.

Before Him then the Son of God, the Prince of Israel sitting at Jacob's well before the woman of Samaria coming to draw water. There then can be no more the faulty representation of the truth which is afterwards expressed in the words: *How can we give the Jews?* — ver. 38. — But recall also how the Father concerned as to the poor Samaritan woman, how in His conversation with her from beginning to end He shows himself as "the authority of earth" (John 1:10-11), full of heavenly wisdom and at the same time of perfectly human sympathy. — From

Ver. 10. "*Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink ; thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.*"

The water sprang up there, in Jacob's well, as a noble *gift of God* to all the thirsty. If the Samaritan had known the Giver of this gift, she would have—well, what would she have done ? She would have gladly given the draught of water to the Petitioner. No doubt. But the Lord goes on a step further, in order to bring near before the woman's mind that heavenly gift of God, of which the earthly gift is only the type. "*If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that said to thee, Give me to drink*"—which gift of God, more precious than that which thou art now come out to draw, stands before thee in *Him* who says to thee, (call it if thou wilt *asking*), Give me to drink,—"*thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water,*" thou wouldst then be the thirsty and asking party, and *I* the refreshing and bestowing one ; and the water that *I* would then have given thee, is other water than that which this well gives, *living water*, drawn from the freshest of all springs ; compared to which, the water even of this well cannot be called living. (Comp. Psalms xxxvi. 10 ; lxxxvii. 7 ; Isaiah xii. 3 ; xli. 17, 18 ; xliv. 3 ; lv. 1 ; lviii. 11 ; and many other passages, in which the saving gift of heavenly life is shadowed forth under the image of refreshing and life-giving water.) Christians, who through grace know Him who is here speaking, hear something more in these words about "living water" than the Samaritan woman was then able to discern in them. Well then ! as often as we receive from God's bounteous hand our daily bread, the earthly gift should remind us of the heavenly gift to which it allures us on, of the bread of life which God will give to those who ask Him ; and if a disciple of Jesus, suffering from thirst, knocks at our door, we will joyfully extend to him the cup of hospitality, yea, and anticipate him with the prayer that he, in the name of Jesus, by interceding for us and blessing us, will

give us living water. Let that be for us the reward to be received for giving to Christ's members a cup of cold water to drink (Matt. x. 42).

But observe how the asking and the giving go together. The Lord will gladly give—His gift is all ready for us; but it is only to them who ask that He can give.

Ver. 11, 12. "*The woman saith unto Him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; from whence then hast thou this living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof, himself, and his children, and his cattle?*"

The woman is struck by the calm majesty of Him who had said to her, Give Me to drink! Quite involuntarily she calls Him *Lord*, greeting even the *Jew* as one calling for respect. But yet, as to asking Him to give her of this living water, she is still far from *that*. Her eyes are still fixed exclusively on the water of her Jacob's well; this, she thinks, she can more easily draw with her bucket than the strange "Sir," whose hand (she thinks) can scarcely reach down the depth of the well; and she asks with surprise, not unmingled with irony, *Whence then hast thou this living water*, which thou wouldest have given to me if I had asked thee for it? Yes, she felt offended at the thought that the stranger is perhaps thinking of the water of some other well, and that He calls *that* living when compared with the water of her renowned Jacob's well. Therefore she exclaims with great eagerness, "*Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well?*" She lays an emphasis on the *our* and *us*, in opposition to the Jewish stranger (comp. chap. viii. 53). For just this was the falsely pretended glory of the Samaritans (a *Sychar* glory)—namely, that they were descended through Joseph from Jacob; Jacob's well, they thought, supplied Jacob's true children.

The Lord does not at first take up the dispute concerning the origin of the Samaritans which had been thus brought forward; He does not advert to it until ver. 22; rather, He presses on in

His loving endeavour to make the woman a petitioner for God's gift of living water. He, therefore, will not throw contempt upon the water of this renowned well; but He shows her how miserable Jacob would have been if he had not known and drunk of some other water besides this, the refreshment of which he shared with his cattle; and how poor are now they to whom "their father Jacob" has left no other inheritance except this well.

Ver. 13, 14. "*Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*"

The water which Jesus gives is better than *this* water of Jacob's well. *Every one who drinketh of THIS water*—whether it be Jacob and his children, or the Samaritan woman and her fellow-countrymen—*shall thirst again*. The woman could not deny that (ver. 15). And we, too, cannot deny that no water of earth, no enjoyment of earth, can ever allay our thirst for perfect satisfaction both of *body* and *soul*. All that is in the world, all comfort from the creature, even all allowed joy of a fleeting nature, bears this inscription: "He who drinketh hereof shall thirst again." To-day full, to-morrow faint again.

"What is there to-day that gives me gladness,
That does not to-morrow bring me sadness?"

And when all perishable things have come to an end, and when, after this world has passed away, there will not be found a drop of water left to quench the world's thirst which will still be felt, ah, how will the thirsting soul of worldly men be then pierced by the words, "Thou, in thy lifetime, receivedst *thy* good things, the water which cools *thy* tongue!" (Luke xvi. 25.) To thirst *again* in this world, and to thirst *for ever* in the next—such is the miserable lot of the earthly-minded.

So it was as yet with this woman; but Jesus stands before her, and would fain awaken in her poor soul *that* thirst which

He came into the world to appease. "Whilst He was offering her the water, and, as it were, making it gush out upon her, He, at the same time, sought to make her thirst for it" (Bogatzy. Therefore He extols the wonderful property of the water which she should ask Him for: "*But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.*" The Son of God *gives* living water—first, by giving *Himself* to redeem the world which was pining away in death; and secondly, by making the life which is in Him *for* the redeemed, to be, through the Holy Ghost (Rom. viii. 2), a happy, blessed life *in* them. In the beginning life *was* in Him (chap. i. 4); and this life-stream of the eternal Word, which forth from Paradise flowed through this world's dark valley of death, until its whole fulness was collected in the flesh of the Son of Man—this life-stream will never dry up, but will ever become deeper and broader (Ezek. xlvii.); in the kingdom of grace, imparting grace for grace to all who drink thereof for their healing from sin and death, and in the paradise of the new, glorified earth, refreshing the perfected saints with rapture for ever and ever (Rev. xxii. 1-17).

Thus there *is* the water of life, and indeed for all that thirst: only to *drink*—nothing else is required of us but to *drink*, and then we have full satisfaction. But if the water which Christ gives is life in His name, what would our drinking be except *faith*, which receives eternal life by seizing and keeping hold on Christ? (chap. iii. 15, 16, 36). Now we understand also the blessed promise, "*He shall never thirst.*" (Comp. chap. vi. 47-51, viii. 51.) It is true that there is not a believer who, having drunk yesterday out of Christ's fulness, does not desire and need to drink of it again to-day. But whilst the world's thirst of ungodly men ever burns and torments, and is the prelude to eternal thirst in hell, the life's thirst of believers is in itself a source of their joy, just as the drawing of the breath in the fresh air is a delight to the body; for never will they thirst *without being satisfied*, not in this world, not in eternity, because the life of their faith runs on, fed by drinking evermore of the foun-

tain of life which, from Christ, is ever streaming towards them. If ever thou dost thirst for eternal life, and yet dost not also at the moment of thirsting drink—yes, then indeed thou hast torment, for thou hast gone from love and fallen upon fear, and fear hath torment (1 John iv. 18). “The water which Christ gives has in itself an *eternal* strength; where thirst returns, the fault is not in the *water*, but in him who *drinks*” (Bengel).

The power possessed by this living water that Christ gives of for ever satisfying the thirst of those who drink of it, is set forth in the words which follow: “*But the water that I shall give him shall be IN HIM a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*” Thus is fulfilled the prophetic word: “The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a *spring of water, whose waters fail not*” (Isa. viii. 11). Now, surely the fountain itself can never thirst! Not *once*, nor even only a few times, does Christ give to souls which thirst the water of His blessed life to drink; the water which faith has once drunk becomes thenceforward a living well in the believer himself—a well which never ceases to spring, unless unbelief chokes it up. Ay, and as of the grace of the new life in general, so likewise of every particular grace which we receive is it true, that it is a living shoot planted in our hearts, from which a tree of blessing bearing fruit will grow up into eternal life, if only we are *faithful* in tending it. “Every spiritual grace has for its aim and object a blessed eternity; to that must everything be directed. From the time that we receive the smallest drop of the water of eternal life, our thirst must forthwith wax and increase; and thus we shall ever receive more and more grace and strength. There must, and there will be, a continual progress, for the spiritual blessing within us is a *spring* which becomes a stream, flowing on and on unceasingly” (Bogatzky). It is not, then, from an excavated well without us, but from a springing well within, that the water flows which *springs up into everlasting life*. As all the fountains and streams

of earth are of one water with the sea into which they empty themselves, so the fountain of life which bubbles up in the very weakest believer, contains one and the same eternal life into which, as into a boundless ocean, it flows, with all other similar life-fountains. The pure river of living water, clear as crystal, which proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. xxii. 1), receives into itself all the crystal-clear rivulets of life which spring forth where the abode of God and of the Lamb is, in the Church of the faithful; and though with a new and perfectly glorious joy, such as belongs to sight, yet with the same kind of joy as they tasted in faith, will the saints for ever drink that water of life; for it is one water that is drunk in the Jerusalem below and in the Jerusalem above.

The water of life is ever at hand; Christ gives it to all who thirst; it ever quenches the thirst, because that to whomsoever it is given to drink, to him it becomes a well springing up into eternal life. Hast *thou* drunk of this water? Hast thou within thee the life which originates with God, and which flows to God, the well of *that* water which *is* for ever living, and which therefore *springs* up into everlasting life? If thou believest, say Yes! Yet stop. Dost thou believe *aright*, as we should believe according to God's gracious ordinance? Christ freely gives the water of life to every one who thirsts, but He only gives it by means of those channels of the Holy Ghost which bind together heaven and earth, namely, through the *Word* and the *Sacraments*. It is in the Word and in the Sacraments that Christ, who exists every where, in heaven and in earth, *exists for us*, and there He will have Himself be found, embraced, and held fast by us. If we would have Him take up His abode in us with His life, and become in us a springing well of joy and grace, in what other way may that be brought to pass, except through that same word which makes His Spirit the Spirit of our life, and through those same Sacraments which implant His God-man's Person into our person, and transforms both body and soul into His likeness? Finely does an old divine remark:

“Living water—what is that but the life in sonship with God which we receive in our baptism? What is it but the life of Christ, which feeds us with His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper? What is it but the life of the Holy Ghost which is given to us in the Gospel? Yes, it is *that* water which exhibits itself in the heart of God the Father as a well-spring, in all the angels as a brooklet of glory, in the elect as a ripple of life; and this water carries all who drink of it, with it into the eternal lap from which it sprung, into that unfathomable sea of the Deity to which it hastens to return.”

VER. 15. “*The woman saith unto Him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.*”

She *does ask*, then; she asks for that very water of which the stranger has been speaking to her; but does she now know the gift of God, and who He is of whom she now asks, “*Give me this water, that I thirst not!*” We read in chapter vi. the discourse of Jesus on the Bread of Life; there we shall find that when the Lord said, “Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven, for the bread of life is He which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world,” the people answered, “*Lord, evermore give us this bread.*” It is in just the same frame of mind that the woman here asks for *that water* which stands in the same relation to the water from Jacob’s well, as the true Bread from Heaven does to the manna eaten by the children of Israel in the wilderness. (Comp. especially ver. 49.) She longs for that living water which would for ever quench her thirst, but she does not yet know with what *life* it fills those who drink of it—what *eternal life* is. She wishes to be relieved from the labour and fatigue of drawing daily from that deep well—“*that I come not hither to draw;*” but that the water which Jesus gives refreshes *such* souls as are released through His grace from the weariness of their *sins*, this she as yet did not know. Dear brother, dost *thou* know? Dost thou know what thou art asking when, in the Lord’s Prayer, thou sayest, “Deliver us from evil?” Alas, how many there are who only long for deliverance

from the *evils* of this vale of tears, instead of from evil—the evil of sin ; who only wish to be released from the earthly yoke of their misery, and do not long to be with Christ in heavenly glory ! Yet as many as through grace know what this woman did not know, such appropriate her words in a fuller meaning, and, despairing of all broken cisterns,—above all, of drawing peace from the well of their own righteousness,—turn to Christ, the living Spring, saying, “*Lord, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw;*” and as they drink of the water that Jesus gives, they lift up their voice and sing the praises of this dear Friend, a Friend in whom they find such a wondrous sweetness of goodness as

“Fulfil their wants, absolves their woes,
And brings their soul to soft repose.”

Into soft *repose* out of *anguish*, that is the way ! The Samaritan woman was to learn that way, and to know that it is only to *poor sinners* that the living water which Jesus Christ brings is precious.

Ver. 16. “*Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.*”

“That I *come not hither* to draw,” the woman had said—and on these words Jesus fastens. It is as if He had said, “For all that, come hither and draw here ; but first go and call thy husband,—behold, I know that thou wilt then come *thirsting*: yes, then thou wilt ask of Me and I will give thee living water.” At this the woman’s conscience was awakened, and she began to feel what the Saviour meant by *thirsting*, for she could only interpret His words to mean, “Come hither with thy *sin*.” How should she answer Him ? Trembling and with downcast eyes

Ver. 17, 18. “*The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus ‘lays His finger (as is remarked in the “Berlin-burger Bible”)* on the wound, but with such kindness and tenderness, that it would seem as if He feared to give her pain,’ and says to her, *Thou hast well said, I have no husband, for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband : in that saidst thou truly*”

Thus was the life of this sinner laid bare before her eyes ! All that she had ever done (ver. 29)—all the crowd of sin that she had accumulated in her five marriages—all the accusations which fell on her on account of her five divorces (she knew, and He who talked with her knew also, *how* she had been divorced)—all the guilty disgrace which she had brought upon herself in the insatiable thirst of carnal lust, since she had been living with one who was not her husband—all this lay before her, rendered vivid by the lightning flash of *the Word* who is sharper than any two-edged sword, and is a divider of the thoughts and intents of the heart, in whose sight there is no creature that is not manifest, but all things are naked and opened before His eyes (Heb. iv. 12, 13). Did she *now* thirst for the water which Jesus gives ?

Pause here, my soul ! The gospel is preached to thee, but to thee it is not sweet ; Christ offers thee the water of eternal life, but thou feelest no thirst for it ; He is waiting to be thy Saviour and to make thee happy, but thou feelest no need of a Saviour for thy happiness. “ *Go, call thy husband, and come hither !* ” Go and call forth out of the depths of thy slumbering conscience *the sin*, that one sin of thy life which has got the mastery over thee, and has made thee its slave, so that a whole legion of lusts and desires stands at its command ; see, in this one ruling sin, that thy whole life is sin, that thou art a lost and condemned man, and then *come hither*,—come in true repentance to the Saviour of sinners and receive in faith the forgiveness of thy sins ; thou wilt then have drunk of the *living water*, for where forgiveness of sins is, there is life and blessedness. Especially remember this bidding of our Lord, when thou art *examining* thyself before partaking of the holy Sacrament.

Ver. 19. “ *The woman saith unto Him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.* ”

There is her confession of sin, and the Lord is satisfied with this quiet admission of guilt. Just as Nathanael bows before Jesus as the Son of God, whose ear had caught the most secret aspirations of his soul, so this woman acknowledges the wonder-

ful stranger, whose eyes surveyed her sinful life, to be a *Prophet*. But as we go on reading, we are almost disposed to feel sorry for this Samaritan woman, for it seems as if she wants to elude Jesus' exhortation to repentance, and to turn off the discourse about *her soul* to the discussion of a religious "controversy." Yet no, that is surely not possible ! For then the Lord could not have entered, as He does, upon the topic she suggested, neither should we hear concerning her what the Evangelist relates in verse 28 and onward. We may, therefore, pursue our reading with renewed interest.

Ver. 20. "*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.*"

She would fain at once go and *worship*; she would fain at once go and seek expiation for her sins on Mount Gerizim. But suddenly the thought flashes across her: "To Gerizim? *Thither* this Prophet who told me all things that ever I did will not accompany me!" Attracted away to *Jerusalem* by the Prophet who had called her to repentance, but also clinging to Gerizim from the remembrance of her fathers (meaning thereby, although mistakenly, also Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), she points to this neighbouring place of prayer and sacrifice which the people of Sichem frequented, and her words are in effect a *petition* that Jesus would decide to which of the two places her thirsting soul should go. "I pray thee," she says, "that thou wouldest take pity upon my misery, and shew me the *way* by which I may find peace in my distress. Thou hast revealed to me my sin; therefore I feel confidence in thee, that thou knowest how to instruct me in the way of righteousness, by which I may become free from sin. Thou hast brought me into death; now, therefore, bring me back again to life!" (Brenz).

But wilt thou blame her, that she does not at once turn to *Jesus* who surely had said to her, "If thou hadst asked of me, *I*, I would have given thee living water?" Remember, O my soul, how long it was before *thou* didst turn with thy thirst to *Jesus Himself*, and then wilt thou have sympathy with this woman.

Jesus sympathises and has patience with her. He understands the piteous inquiry of her soul, and gives an answer which proffers to her, and to thousands after her, a precious draught of living waters.

Ver. 21. "*Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.*"

To the question which agitated her anguished soul, "*Gerizim or Jerusalem?*" and which she sought to have decided by this "Prophet," the Lord replies with a "Woman, believe me!" which at once entreats and awakens confidence. This is the only time that we hear this particular form of expression from His lips. From the Jews He *demand*s a hearing: "Verily, verily I say unto you," is His manner of address to them; from this Samaritan woman He *begs* a hearing, and most condescendingly invites her to faith in His word. And this word which He is about to speak is a word full of comfort: "*The hour cometh, when ye—shall worship the Father.*" What sweetness lay in this word "*Father*" for the trembling sinner who was now feeling God's wrath!

But the Lord's word reaches still further. To worship the *Father* who reveals Himself in the *Son*, the true God whom hitherto they had not known (ver. 22): this salvation was now to come to *the Samaritans*, and it was near. But *where* would the Father vouchsafe to be found, and to give grace to those who should worship Him? *Whither* should this woman, *whither* should her fellow-sinners of Samaria hasten, in order to drink this *living water*? *Where* does this well of salvation spring? *Neither in this mountain* (Gerizim), *nor yet at Jerusalem*. In Gerizim the living God has not placed the memorials of His name at all; at present, it is true, He *has* placed it at Jerusalem; but the hour cometh when the partition which divides Jerusalem from Samaria and all the Gentile nations shall be done away, and *every place* on the earth shall become a real Jerusalem through the revelation of the *Father* in the word of grace:

when *no place* on the earth will any longer confine the streams of salvation as in a sealed up well. Yes, the hour cometh for the fulfilment of the prophecy in Mal. i. 11: "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in *every place* incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering: for My name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of Hosts." (Comp. also 1 Kings viii. 27; Isa. lxvi. 1; Amos ix. 2.) But who is to bring this hour of salvation? It is He who on Mount Moriah meditated to appear as the Sacrifice for the sin of the world—a Sacrifice which, once offered, avails for ever; and in whose glorified body was to be built up the spirit and truth, of which the temple at Jerusalem was but a symbol (chap. ii. 19).

Ver. 22. "*Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews.*"

Thus the woman, and with her all Samaritans, were to repair, not indeed to the *temple at Jerusalem*, but to that living God who was worshipped at Jerusalem, and to forsake the imaginary God whom they worshipped in Mount Gerizim. "*Ye worship ye know not what.*" It is only the true God who makes the true worship. But the true, living God (the *Father* of Jesus Christ), had not revealed Himself to the Samaritans, nor had He appointed their worship; their place of prayer, therefore, was not filled with the presence of His glory, and their hearts—even if they longed for nearness to God (Acts xvii. 23)—were yet imagining a something which they worshipped as God, and on which they imposed a mask of the true God, in a voluntary adoption, without being authorised to do so, of the law of Moses. Their knowledge of God was an empty knowledge, which could not impart consolation to their hearts (chap. i. 18), because it grew not on the soil where the works of Divine revelation were wrought. God in Christ alone imparts living water.

"*We know what we worship.*" *We*—thus the Lord classes Himself with the nation from which, according to the flesh, He was sprung; He is not ashamed of the name of *Jew* (ver. 9).

The true Israel worshipped the true God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God “who sheweth His ways unto Moses, His statutes and judgments unto Israel;” *the* God who, through the Prophets, had spoken of His *Son*—the *Father*, therefore, who, in the promise of salvation, had opened His Father’s heart wide to His people—“*for salvation is of the Jews.*”

Abraham’s seed is the blessing of the world (comp. Isa. xix. 24). *Because*, in the Saviour, salvation is of the Jews, *therefore* the Jews alone knew the true God; but the Samaritans, who, by rejecting the prophets, of whom Christ is the substance, rejected also the End of the Law, did not know God, and their worship was a salvationless worship, a drinking without water.

See how exactly the Samaritan worship is like natural religion, and what men call Rationalism! *They worship, they know not what*—is that not true of the rational religion and piety of the reason which so many persons possess, who would take it very ill if they were called godless, for “surely,” they say, they “think on God,” they “surely worship Him,” they “surely believe in God’s word,” that is—just like the Samaritans—in God’s word *in* the Bible, to wit, that which *they* consider to be God’s word. Oh, the gnawing emptiness of *all* hearts which have not Jesus, who “pray” to a God that is not there—for “whosoever abideth not in the doctrine of Christ *hath not God*,” (2 John 9)—this emptiness is a seal (verily, a seal in black!) to the memorable word: “*Salvation is of the Jews.*” It is not without meaning that just in this very place where He announces that the barriers of the old Jerusalem were now to be done away, and that the arrival of that blessed time was at hand, when in every place where true worshippers are gathered together, the true God should be worshipped in spirit and in truth.—I say, it is not without meaning that the Saviour should just here have drawn so strong a distinction between, on the one hand, the God who alone *is* and who alone *imparts* truth and life, viz., the God of *Israel* and the *Father* of that eternal Son, who as Son of Man came out of Israel to be the Saviour of the world; and on the

other, a self-chosen god, who is merely the lifeless copy of his false worshippers' *own spirit*, a god who neither has nor gives any salvation to make the sinner happy. No man can be a branch of the tree of salvation, unless he has been grafted into the holy tree of Israel (Rom. xi.) Japhet dwells in the tents of Shem, and the nations bow down to the Shiloh of the stock of Judah. There is no salvation but in Him who "sprang out of Judah," our Lord (Heb. vii. 14).

Ver. 23, 24. "*But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*"

Salvation comes *from* the Jews, and when the Saviour spoke this, was even then present amongst them; *but the hour cometh, and is even now come*, when the Gospel of salvation in Christ, going forth from Judea, shall fill Samaria and all nations to the ends of the world (Acts i. 8; Is. xi. 3); then shall the *true worshippers*—those who abandon the foolish and fruitless worship of Samaria, and who, like those first-fruits in verse 41, hasten to Christ for living water, together with those who, out of the types and shadows of Jerusalem, press forward with satisfaction and joy to the substance of heavenly blessings in Christ—these all with one accord shall *worship the Father in spirit and in truth*.

They shall worship *the Father*; the Father of the only-begotten Son, and through Him, *their* Father also, according to the right, by regeneration made over, to be children of God by faith in the salvation which Christ has obtained for them. The true worshippers cry: "Abba, Father!" (Rom. viii. 15); that is their one chief mark, written in their hearts by the Holy Ghost. For they shall worship the *Father in spirit and in truth*.

In spirit—it is indeed the Holy Ghost who really prays in the hearts of true worshippers; He it is who *actuates* the children of God, so that their lips do not speak words which *sound* like prayer, but their whole life becomes a sacrifice in the wor-

ship of the Father. But where the Holy Ghost makes praying hearts, where He teaches them to pray and to live in prayer, there we worship the Father also *in truth*: we really meet the true God with our prayers and our worship, because we walk in the light of the Holy Ghost which enlightens with the *Word* of truth, and because, in faith in Jesus Christ, through whom "truth came," we draw near to the Father in the way which He has appointed (chap. xvii. 17; chap. i. 17; Eph. ii. 18).

And where is the *place* of this worship? It is neither on Mount Gerizim nor at Jerusalem, neither on altars of a self-elected thing of thought, which they call God, nor in a visible sanctuary, as that one in which, until the time of fulfilment, the Spirit had its earthly image and truth its foreshadowing type (1 Kings viii. 27; ch. i. 17; Phil. iii. 3). Rather it is everywhere, wherever the Spirit is and truth is; and Spirit and truth—Lord, we thank Thee that *we know what we worship!*—are wherever the word and sacraments bring forth and nourish children of God unto eternal life; they have been since the Pentecostal inauguration of the Church, wherever the Holy Ghost, through the Gospel, calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies all Christendom upon earth, and keeps it in fellowship with Jesus Christ in the *one true* faith.

"*For the Father seeketh such to worship Him.*" Here the Saviour graciously and condescendingly speaks to this woman's very heart. God's fatherly love meets her desire to seek God with a corresponding desire to seek sinners, in order, amongst the company of true worshippers, to save her individually. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost have to *seek* for true worshippers: how precious, therefore, must they be? Art thou become one? then give the glory to the triune God who sought thee until He found thee, and whose condescending love it was that overcame thy resistance.

Worshippers in spirit and in truth God seeks, because He Himself *is Spirit* (not, *a Spirit*, one among others). His love seeks its own image, nothing else avails before Him. The eternal,

unsearchable Being of God, that which His name Jehovah bespeaks, what He reveals when He says: "*I, the Lord,*"—that is *Spirit*. His almighty power, His blessed life, His holy will, in short, all that Scripture teaches to recognise in God's Being is contained in this word: *God is Spirit*. The preaching of the Gospel expresses the same truth by the words: "God is *Light*" (1 John i. 5). We should, indeed, know nothing of God's eternally-personal Being, nor should we understand what the word *Spirit* signifies, if the same God who is Spirit were not likewise *love* (1 John iv. 16), and if He did not, out of love to His poor creatures who, through sin, have become Spirit-bereft and flesh (ch. iii. 6; Jude 19), impart to them His Spirit, through whom they know what is in God, and in whom they offer up all prayer and supplication (1 Cor. ii. 10-12; Eph. vi. 18). And thus the Father has those who in Him worship the true God who by nature *is* Spirit, and this as true children of God, who, through grace, are *born* spirit of Spirit, through *His* grace, that is, who like the Father is also Spirit (2 Cor. iii. 17), and who *became* flesh, and who now, as Immanuel, imparts living water to all who thirst, and to be in them a well springing up into everlasting life. Wherever this inward well of life from God empties itself into God, there the Father is worshipped *in spirit and in truth*. First, we *must become* spirit and truth, and then *worship* in spirit and in truth. This was the same change which Jesus told Nicodemus he *must* experience (ch. iii. 7). But praised be that grace, through which we are *able* to do that which we *must*! "We have wandered to that which is without, we are directed to that which is within. Within thee do thy work. And dost thou wish to find some exalted, some holy place? then give *thyself* inwardly to God to be a temple. Dost thou want to pray in a temple? pray within *thyself*. For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. But first *become* a temple of God, for him only will God hear who calls to Him out of His temple" (Augustine.)

Ver. 25. "*The woman saith unto Him, I know that Messias*

cometh, which is called Christ ; when He is come, He will tell us all things."

Before she said this to *Jesus*, she said it no doubt in her heart whilst He was conversing with her. "If thou knewest who it is that saith to thee: Give Me to drink," these words became now quick in her soul. Her gaze is fixed on the prophet, whose words have first pierced her heart like a sharp arrow, and then dropped healing balm into the wound. Could it be *He*? Could *He* be the *Messiah* Himself? She dares not believe it, although her heart bounds forward with unknown joy to meet the true Bridegroom. "*I know that Messias cometh,*" she says. All that, as a Samaritan, she had ever heard, out of the five books of Moses, concerning a Messiah, a "Deliverer of the world," who shall comfort them in their labour and toil on the earth which God had cursed; the "Prophet" that, according to Deut. xviii. 18 was looked for, who "shall speak all that God shall command Him"—all this now wakes up in her mind, and she is ready to welcome the Messiah, even although He, and salvation with Him, *should be of the Jews*. "*He will tell us all things,*" He will tell me and my poor fellow-countrymen what *Thou* hast just been telling me about "living water," about the "Father," about worshipping the Father "in spirit and in truth;" all this, and every thing else which belongs to our salvation He will tell us plainly and fully, and enlighten us to the full understanding of it. Oh, that He may *soon* come! Thou saidst just now: "The hour cometh, and *now is!*" Is He then really come? Oh, if He is, then

Jesus lets her no longer thus talk and question within herself. He hastens to meet her longing, as the Lover who, in His office as Saviour, is "like to a roe or a young hart."

Ver. 26. "*Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He.*"

Here the heart of Jesus reveals itself. He can no longer contain Himself, the blessed Lord! He cannot refrain from saying to this poor sinner, who was thirsting for the Messiah, that which He did not even say to a Nicodemus.

“I am He:—that voice, which, when spoken to our hearts by Christ, brings with it the supremest sweetness of Divine grace, and diffuses within us a heavenly joy. See here the power of the Gospel. The alarmed conscience of this sinner could otherwise never be set at rest; but the voice of Christ, although it only utters one little word, makes alive her who was slain, comforts the despairing, gladdens the troubled, gives peace to the distressed. So also for us poor sinners, when death and conscience fall upon us, there is no life nor comfort but in Jesus Christ through the Gospel.” (Brenz.)

When, therefore, O my soul, thou dost come to Him, whether alone in thy chamber, or in the assembly where the preaching of the word is heard, there He first begs of thee: “*Give Me to drink!*” Every confession of sin, every “Lord, have mercy upon us,” with which we commence our worship, is a granting of His request: “*Give Me to drink!*” And if thou dost really refresh the thirst of His love who is seeking thee, then His discourse with thee will end in the quenching of *thy own* thirst: He will be found of thee, if thou seek Him, and will say to thee: “I that speak unto thee am He!” (Comp. Cant. v. 1.)

Behold, the fields are white already to harvest.

CHAPTER IV. 27-42.

Help us, O Lord, that we may bring home to Thee wages of Thy labour, in ourselves and in our brethren whom with us Thou hast redeemed. Amen.

“THE hour cometh, *and now is*”—the Samaritan woman had lived to see it—this blessed hour of the dawn of the New Testament; and with her the first-fruits of Samaria are now called to the worship of the Father, not on Mount Gerizim, nor at Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth. But the full joy of harvest, even in Samaria, was reserved for the disciples (Acts viii. 14); it was to be experienced after their Lord had finished His work, after He had opened to the now redeemed world the way of access to the reconciled Father. It was not till the veil of the temple at Jerusalem was rent in twain, that the worshipping hosts of Samaria and all the Gentile world entered into the Holiest in spirit and in truth (Heb. ix. 8; x. 19, 20). This time of the fulfilling of His joy is the subject of that discourse of our Lord with His disciples upon which we are now about to meditate; and it teaches us what in the harvest-field of the world is *His* work, and what the work of *His servants*.

Ver. 27. “*And upon this came the disciples, and marvelled that He talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest Thou? or, Why talkest Thou with her?*”

That their Master should converse with a *woman*, and espe-

cially with a *Samaritan woman*, this the disciples thought beneath His dignity. As yet they did not fully know the peculiar excellency of a Saviour, viz., that He should stoop to choose the weak and despised of this world (1 Cor. i. 27, 28).

That He had been offering the blessings of the kingdom of Heaven to this Samaritan woman, this they did not for a moment imagine; but they were grieved that they should have been so late in returning with the provisions they had been purchasing; for something to eat or drink He must surely have been *seeking* from the woman, and thereby have got into *conversation* with her. Yet with holy reverence they remain *silent*, not asking, "What seekest Thou? or, Why talkest Thou with her?" O blessed *silence*! Thus do thou also lay thy hand upon thy mouth, and thrust not thy speech upon thy Lord, when He does something which thou canst not yet understand; thou shalt understand it hereafter, and praise Him!

Ver. 28-30. "*The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto Him.*"

With her waterpot on her shoulder she had hitherto been listening to the Lord's discourse. She was the forerunner of those Bechuan women who would stand for hours together, with their milking-pails in their hands, as if rooted to the ground, whilst Moffat was preaching to them the Gospel of the living water.

Now she leaves her waterpot—as Peter and the sons of Zebedee left their nets and their fishes—for she has drawn water which makes her forget the water of Jacob's well; in the pitcher of her heart this water she carries home. Out of the fulness of an overflowing heart she cries out to the first persons she meets: "*Come and see! See a man which told me all things that ever I did.*"

Thus we see, that of all the words which the Saviour spoke to her, His *call to repentance* had entered the deepest into her

heart; in the one word that He had said respecting her sinful life she had heard *everything*; from the knowledge of her transgressions of the sixth commandment she was come to a saving knowledge of *sin*, of her whole depravity. She herself no longer doubts that this is Christ; but her fellow-sinners must “come and see,” and satisfy themselves, and be as certain as she was (ver. 42). In the circumstance that upon the woman’s report *many* (ver. 29) were coming out of the town to Jesus, is seen the field white unto the harvest. That is a pleasant time when the call of a converted sinner finds as easy a hearing from the people of his village or town, as did the call of this Samaritan woman from the people at Sychar. Oh, what a reproach to the Jews, that they would not give heed to the voice of John, God’s “own messenger,” who prepared the way for Christ among them, whilst here, amongst the Samaritans, the testimony of a poor woman was believed in! There, we see the wrath of God abiding upon the unbelieving people; here, the love of God, like the sun, ripening a blessed harvest field. But before the arrival of the Samaritans, the disciples were to view this poor woman with very different eyes from what they had hitherto seen her with.

Ver. 31. “*In the mean while His disciples prayed Him, saying, Master, eat.*”

Just as sometimes a pastor is intreated by his anxious flock, that he will be mindful of his bodily health. I have often met with such a “*Master, eat!*” Oh, that in reply to our over-anxious friends, we might be able, both Sunday and every day, with truth to say the same thing of ourselves, in our measure, that our Lord here does to His beloved disciples!

Ver. 32-34. “*But He said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought Him ought to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work.*”

Yes, some one had indeed brought Him somewhat to eat un-

known to the disciples: the Samaritan woman, whose faith had satisfied His hunger for the salvation of sinners, and whose love was even now bringing to Him souls longing for salvation, to be a further refreshment to Him. Thus His devotion to the *will* of His Father, who sent Him for the redemption and happiness of every poor sinner in the whole world, as well the refreshment derived from every single accomplishment of this good and gracious will, as the longing, which hereby was strengthened, for the *entire accomplishment* of the work of salvation—this is what Jesus calls “*His meat*” which *He* “*has to eat*.” And this is not merely a figurative way of speaking. If the Psalmist knows of that mysterious food, which even the body receives through joy in the Holy Ghost, when he sings, “My heart and my *flesh* rejoice in the living God”—how much more must the pure body of Jesus, the dwelling-place of the living God, have shared in every refreshment which His holy soul experienced! The will of the Father, from which all our salvation springs, it is the Son’s “delight to do” (chap. vi. 39; Ps. xl. 8). “The sinners’ salvation is to the Son a seasoning as it were to the will of His Father; that will in itself was sweet before, but this makes it sweeter still.” (Cyril.) Well did the Saviour know that it was only through His bitter sufferings and death that He could finish the work which His Father had given Him to do; but so perfect is His love to His Father and to us, and so unmixed with self-pleasing is His joy in the glorification of the Father’s name through Him in His brethren, that He longs for this finishing of the Father’s work as the satisfaction of His most ardent desire, as for *food* which He partakes of for the satisfaction of His appetite (Luke xii. 49). That He should call it His *meat* to do the will of His Father is a most beautiful expression of His perfect *obedience*. St. John says of believers, that God’s commandments are *not grievous* to them (1 John v. 3); it is out of love that they keep them, and not from fear, and this they are able to do “*because as He is, so are we in this world*” (1 John iv. 17, 18). May the Lord lead us

more and more into the mystery of Christian strength and joy, which is there felt where it is the soul's hungry desire to know the Divine Will, and also its refreshing food to do God's will when known. Then do we eat of the *hidden manna* which the world knows not of (Rev. ii. 17).

But not Christ alone: His disciples also are to consider it as their pleasant food, if they can help to carry on and to accomplish the Father's work; if they can be servants of Him who alone is the Finisher of our salvation, collectors of the wages of His labour, reapers of the harvest in His tillage. Therefore the Lord continues thus:—

Ver. 35. "*Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look upon the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*"

Between Joseph's little village and the city of Sichem there lay fields with corn new sprouting from the ground. The disciples feasted their eyes upon this green and hopeful prospect, saying: "*Yet four months and then cometh harvest.*" But in the eyes of the Saviour, the earthly field is but a type of the spiritual field; and here the four months will fain be reckoned by minutes, instead of by days; the field, which it is Jesus' meat and joy to sow with the Gospel, and from it to reap saved souls, is "*white already to harvest.*" The hour was coming and was already come, when the Lord would gather in His whole harvest in Zion and Jerusalem, and to this harvest the Samaritans also were now to be brought. The first grain of seed had sprung up when the Samaritan woman received the words of the Prophet, and pondered them in her heart; and now behold many Samaritans are already on their way to Jesus, to invite Him into their town to gather in the harvest. But yet Samaria did certainly not bound nor fill up the longing gaze of the heavenly Sower; the field upon which He called His disciples to look with eyes of joy, stretches itself from Jerusalem throughout the whole of Samaria, and far away even to the end of the earth. Over this field the Lord sees the promised day already

dawning, when "the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed" (Amos ix. 13), and His words to His disciples: "*Lift up your eyes*," are an invitation to them to rejoice that the hour is coming, and is already come, which was seen by the enraptured eye of Isaiah, when the prophet summoned the sower-nation Israel to come to the harvest-joy: "*Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all as with an ornament, and bind them on thee as a bride doeth*" (Isaiah xlix. 18). In the eyes of Jesus the field of the wide earth was already white to harvest, and it was to be so also by faith in the eyes of the disciples. What they should witness to-day in the city of Samaria was to be to them a prophetic type and prelude, shadowing forth that marvellous harvest of the Gospel into which they as repears were to be sent forth.

Ver. 36. "*And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathreth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.*"

As yet the disciples knew nothing of the meat which Jesus had to eat, but they were to become sharers of His meat and His joy. The joy of the Lord Jesus is the joy of him *who sows*. He was permitted to gather in some first-fruits from the sowing of His love in the days of His flesh; but surely, He leaves behind to His apostles not a field with sheaves already reaped, but a field of wheat *white to the harvest*, to *that* harvest which they were to reap and gather into the barn of eternal life. This is the reaper's wages: *to gather fruit into eternal life*, where one joy, in contemplating the glory of God in sinners once lost and now won, will fill both the reapers and the sower; one food will for ever refresh both Christ and His disciples. The reaper receiveth wages, and marvellous wages indeed they are.

Ver. 37, 38. "*And herein is that saying true, One soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.*"

The disciples richly experienced in Samaria the gracious meaning of these words; for the ripe sheaves which they soon gathered and brought *home* from this harvest field (Acts viii.)—whose labours had produced them? But why do we speak of Samaria? Whose labour is it everywhere that has produced whatever the reapers gather in, in the harvest time of the New Testament? One has done it, Jesus Christ. It is He that with sowing of sweat wrung from His very heart's blood, has produced that which His servants have to bring home with joy. Yes! Not only is He like the sower, but He is also the grain of wheat sown, from which life and salvation springs and grows up into eternal life (chap. xii. 24). Every soul whom *thou*, like Timothy (1 Tim. iv. 16), savest by the preaching of the Divine word, every such sets before thine eyes the saying which here once more is verified: "*One soweth, another reapeth.*"

Woe to the preachers who refuse to lay down the blessing of their harvest at the feet of the great Labourer of Golgotha, into whose finished labours they are entered! And if all *our* labour is harvest work when compared to *His*, how ought we to be ashamed to sigh over it, when to *Him* His work is a pleasant repast!

But although the Lord evidently means chiefly to place Himself as Sower and Labourer in contrast to His apostles as reapers and those who have entered into his labours, yet He includes all the labourers in whom His *spirit* has laboured before as Noah (1 Pet. iii. 19), the Prophets of the Old Covenant (1 Pet. i. 10-12), in conjunction with His own toiling in the days of His *flesh*. *Others* have laboured; the children of the New Covenant enter into the labours of the Holy Ghost working in the Old Covenant, and the children of Pentecost into the labours of the same Spirit working before Pentecost. Also *Bengel's* remark is perfectly to the point: "In the Divine economy there is a wise arrangement of succession; everything earlier is the sowing out of a harvest to follow. Every man is a sower with reference to his successor, and a reaper with reference to his predecessors. Into

Christ's alone meritorious labour do all his servants enter, and reap what, not *they* have sown, but *He*; but yet in the mutual interdependency of God's fellow-workers in His field (1 Cor. iii. 9), which is the Holy Churches, each one is sower and reaper alike. It is of great importance that the blessing of Church fellowship should be thoroughly appreciated.

I can never meditate upon this verse without its coming home to me as an *ordination* text, and I do not know how I could better help the reader to a profitable understanding of it, than by relating the occurrence which this text brings to my mind as a lively interpretation of it.

At the ordination of *Pastor Weiker* (at Great Justin in Pomerania) *Sup. Nagel* read these words as the text to his ordination sermon: "*Herein is this saying true, one soweth and another reapeth.*" But hardly was he able to add the following verse, when the whole congregation burst into tears: the image of their late beloved pastor Höllatz was present to every mind. He had sown so diligently, had laboured so faithfully, and now when the field was "white already to harvest," he had been himself gathered, as ripe fruit, into everlasting life. It was some time before *Nagel* could continue, and then it was nearly in these words: "Yes, here, in this congregation, the saying is most completely true, '*One soweth and another reapeth*;' " but it is also true, generally, in the case of every one who is entrusted with the precious office of a bishop. In thy case, dear brother, it is true in a much more comprehensive sense than that in which it has just now so vividly affected you and us all: our departed friend *Hollatz* here only concludes the long line of predecessors, as successor of whom thou art this day to be ordained to this holy office."

And then this passage was expounded, and set forth as the antidote as well against self-will as also against despondency of heart, according to that power to humble and to comfort which a servant of Jesus Christ was to find in it in the discharge of his office. "*One soweth*," this is first the Author of our salva-

tion, who with His own blood has purchased His Church, and who comes to her by water and by blood and by spirit in the word of truth, that is, by word and sacraments, which form the living, ever-powerful seed from which the Church is developed; but the servants of Jesus Christ in a body reap what they do reap and gather into life eternal only as that which has been sown by Him. Yet, amongst themselves, the labourers in the Lord's harvest are joined together into one chain, in which the last link feels the sustaining power of all the preceding ones. He who is to-day called to be a servant of the Divine Word, enters into the labour of all those who for eighteen centuries have laboured in the field of the Church.

The holy Apostles, the Fathers of the Church—Polycarp, Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, Bernhard, Tauler, Luther and the Reformers, Chemnitz, Gerhard, Arnd, Scriver, &c.—these are some names out of the holy chain of sowers and reapers to which every new ordination adds new links, in order that they may sow what others shall reap after them. The German Bible, the postils, the seed grains of prayer, the hymns, the catechism, all the treasures of sound doctrine, all that the lives of those saints bequeath to us whose blessed end we contemplate: what fulness of sown and ripened labour is there in all these to the Church, into which her servants in the present day enter as joyful reapers! But for him who, as this our brother, is called to the office of a preacher in the Lutheran Church of *our own country*, those words are particularly true: "*One soweth, another reapeth. I have sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.*" For is not our labour, though like a true sacrifice, it must be salted with the salt of affliction, still a reaping of the field which our brethren in Silesia and elsewhere have richly sown with noble seed of tears? Yes, indeed! but yet he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together, even here, and hereafter with a more perfect joy, for they rejoice in the Lord, and say: "Glory to God alone in the highest."

Even to the first reapers in His harvest, the holy apostles, did the Lord Jesus give this saying, to be to them both a salutary *humiliation* and an encouraging *consolation* in their future office. When they might be tempted by the blessing arising from their labour to indulge in vainglorious pride, they would then remember: "What is it then?" Merely the wages of *His* labour! Woe is unto us if we preach *not* the Gospel! (1 Cor. ix. 16.) We *must* do it now that Jesus Christ has become the Gospel's rich treasure of grain. When, on the other hand, the weariness of their office was apt to press heavily upon them, and their patience to fail, then they should remember these words, and beat down their despondency, saying, God be praised, it is not we who are to *make* the harvest. Christ with His precious blood has achieved what we gather into His kingdom. Do we not ourselves say: Only four months and then cometh harvest? Well, it will come, the harvest, if not into our hands, yet into the hands of the reapers who shall come after us; and soon, yes, very soon, will come the great, full harvest, the feast of the ingathering of all sowing, when the world's year of grace is expired (Ex. xxxiv. 22). In the meantime, let us comfort one another with these words: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James v. 7, 8).

Ver. 39, 40. "*And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto Him, they besought Him that He would tarry with them: and He abode there two days.*"

This was from the beginning a much more hopeful believing than the believing of the Jews who "saw the miracles which He did" (chap ii. 23). The testimony of the penitent sinner found souls who would likewise fain have a Saviour for "all

things that ever they did." The people at Jerusalem had never besought Him to tarry with them; but the Samaritans would gladly have kept Him amongst them for ever. For two days He did tarry in their city, in order to give them living water; and when He again went on His way, He left behind Him in many a house at Sichem wells of water springing up into everlasting life. For *His word* had followed upon the *saying of the woman*, and had worked in many souls who were longing for salvation and prepared to receive it, the assurance in which one may joyfully sing, "I know in whom I have believed."

Ver. 41, 42. "*And many more believed because of His own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*"

There is a well known saying of *St. Augustine's*, which those who belong to the Romish Church are especially fond of quoting, it runs thus: "I would not believe the Gospel if I were not moved thereto by the authority of the Catholic (universal) Church." May the authority of the *really* Catholic Church ever abide in all honour. The Church—Zion, "who telleth good tidings"—moves me to believe the Gospel, if she proclaim the Gospel pure and unadulterated, "for faith cometh by hearing." But I do not continue dependent on her report, but only on Him who is proclaimed: Christ who saves me. Yet we may learn from *Augustine* himself the true meaning of this passage of his. On the 41st verse, he says: "First they believed because of the woman's report, and afterwards, because of the presence of the truth. So it is at the present day with those who are without, and are not yet Christians. Christ is proclaimed to them through Christian friends; the Church, like this woman, testifies of Christ, and cries: Come and see! And thus they come to Christ, believing because of the saying of the Church. But now He tarries with them, and instructs them by His word; and thus they believe in Him more firmly, that He is of a truth the Saviour of the world.

Then what ought the witnessing confession of the Church, and the witnessing "saying" of believers to be to us? A witness of the Light, and not the Light itself (chap. i. 8); a ray from the Sun of Truth and Life, by the light of which we must find our way to the Sun Himself. The ground of our faith is Christ alone, who in the Gospel offers Himself to us, and who reveals Himself "in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and *in much assurance,*" to all who gladly receive His word. But if we through the power of God have experience, and if the Holy Ghost have sealed it in our hearts, that Christ is in very deed the Saviour whom the Church confesses and adores, then from the bottom of our hearts we join our voices in accord, and speak because we believe, not *because* of the Church's "saying," but *with* the Church's "saying," as being the genuine echo of that word which the living God is speaking to His children. May the Lord give to every pastor very many members of the Church, and to His beloved Church very many congregations, who with all due thankfulness to God, that through the preaching and ghostly care of faithful witnesses, and by the faithful helping hand of the Church's confession, they have been built up upon the faith of the saints, yet are also able to say: "*Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*"

The Saviour, and indeed the Saviour of the *world*, and therefore of the Samaritans also, have they found in Jesus. Then they found in Him the right thing. Do thou include thyself also, and reposing on faith in the word, say: "Jesus Christ is the world's Saviour and mine." By doing this thou dost set to thy seal that God is true, and thou hast eternal life. Amen.

The other Miracles that Jesus did in Galilee.

CHAPTER IV. 43-54.

O Lord, teach us to believe before we see, in order that we may believe when we see, and that when we do not see, we may yet believe. Amen.

THE faith of the Samaritans had refreshed the Saviour, as fresh water does a weary traveller. He comes now to Galilee. Should they not have gone out to meet Him with shouts of joy? Should not waiting hearts have greeted in Him the Saviour? It is true the Galileans received Him; but it was not a Samaritan's reception of Him in Sichem. The Lord had worked no signs and wonders; it was because of His *word* that many believed on Him (ver. 41), to wit, such as thirsted for a Saviour. But in Galilee the people clung to the husk and shell of the Gospel—to the miracles of Jesus which struck the senses; to the sweet kernel which those miracles as *signs* concealed they penetrated not, for the longing for salvation was wanting. This filled the Lord with sadness. Yet even in Galilee He finds Saviour's "meat" to eat. To purify souls, and to make them capable of receiving the revelation of His glory; when in some degree capable, graciously to lead them on yet further, that He Himself might become the *ground* of their belief, and not merely His miracles; the substance and His word, and not merely what they saw: this was His labour of love in Galilee; and of this the evangelist puts forward an instance, in the guidance by which He led the nobleman of Capernaum.

Ver. 43, 44. "*Now after two days He departed thence, and went into Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country.*"

He had testified it, and now it was to come to pass. Compared to Samaria, the honour which Galilee paid to its Prophet was very small, and Nazareth indeed refused Him the honour altogether. It is a reproach to human nature *that a Prophet hath no honour in his own country*. The nearer the mild and condescending goodness of God comes to people, the more vehemently do some thrust it from them, for they are ashamed to confess that they are not worthy of it, and are annoyed at the daily sight of such a messenger of love, because it distracts them in their worldly occupation.

Ver. 45, 46. "*Then when He was come into Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast. So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where He made the water wine.*"

If, as we have supposed, the Lord returned to Galilee immediately after the feast, and the time of His baptising disciples in Judea was between that first and this other return, He would then, during His first stay there, have continued in perfect retirement. But, on the present occasion, He allowed Himself to be received as a "Prophet," as also the Galileans on their part were fain to bask in the splendour of all that the Son of Joseph, their Joseph, had wrought in Jerusalem. "The Evangelist mentions the wonders which the Galileans had seen, in order to bring out into stronger light the pure faith in the word which the Samaritans had evidenced" (Chrysostom). What does the Lord find in thy house when He returns to it, seeking fruit from some revelation of His Glory with which thou hast been previously blessed? He found little else in Cana but the want to see fresh miracles.

Ver. 46, 47. "*And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto Him, and besought Him*

that He would come down and heal his son ; for he was at the point of death."

An officer at the court of King Herod Antipas heard of Jesus' arrival in Galilee. He had retained in his mind the image of that Wonder-worker ever since the time of his seeing Him,—perhaps at Jerusalem,—and through the sickness of his son, his remembrance of Him had become more vivid. "Will He come to Capernaum? If He does, I will venture it, and ask Him for help; by so doing my honour as a courtier will be staked, but my son is dearer to me than that." In this way we may conceive the father to have reasoned with himself. But Jesus did not come to Capernaum. On this he determined to start off for Cana. We see that there is something in the man that is worthy of Christ's attention. He confides without hesitation in the power of Jesus, that he is able to heal his dying son; he also trusts in His goodness, that He will not consider the journey from Cana to Galilee too troublesome. To be sure it would have been finer if, instead of the sick child, it had been a pure longing after salvation which had brought the man to Jesus; for then the healing of his son would have been given to him in addition (if it had been the means of God's glorification in him) whilst, moreover, so poor a conception of Jesus' wonder-working power as that He must *come down* in order to be able to help him, would hardly have entered into the heart of one who was looking to find with Jesus the kingdom of Heaven. It was then a very imperfect petition, accompanied by a very imperfect faith, with which the nobleman approached the Lord; and, therefore, it is the sharp knife of the surgeon that touches him in the answer.

Ver. 48. "*Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.*"

Thus we see the nobleman did *not* yet believe according to the Lord's use of the word *belief*. It is true, he believed in Jesus as the worker of a miracle for his child, but he did not believe in Him as a Saviour for himself. Therein was he a type of the

Galileans generally ; and therefore it is that the Lord says to him, *ye*,—His eye sorrowfully looking back to Samaria. But would they *believe* even were they to see the signs and wonders that they so longed for? Why, they had already seen what Jesus had done at Jerusalem and here at Cana, and yet they did not believe ; never would they believe unto *salvation* until they should receive into their hearts the Person whom the signs pointed out—until they should receive Him as the Saviour. It is to this that the Lord wishes to draw this man. He does not refuse his request ; no, but He grants him more than he had asked for. As if He said, “Art thou thyself in want of nothing from me? Shall I only heal thy son? Dost thou prefer My signs and My wonders to Myself? And is this to be and to remain all thy faith—merely to believe that I am a Prophet who does signs and wonders?”

Hereby may we examine ourselves, what it is our love attaches itself to when we say, we love God. Is it really his person that we love, or should we cease to love Him if we did not see “signs and wonders” in all kinds of deliverance which we meet with? Asaph confesses, “Lord, if I have only Thee I ask for nothing more from heaven or from earth” (Psa. lxxiii. 35),—may God teach us thus to believe in Him and love Him!

The poor distressed father had not expected such a reception from Jesus,—but, nevertheless, that he deserved it his heart told him, wounded as it was by the Lord’s rebuke, in which, however, there was not the slightest tone of displeasure. He staggers, indeed, for a moment, hesitating whether he shall go away or remain ; he would gladly bring forward something else than the petition for the desired miracle ; but now, from his agonized spirit, only one cry can burst forth.

Ver. 49. “*The nobleman saith unto Him, Sir, come down, ere my child die.*”

And the Lord hears more in this cry of distress than the nobleman could have said in many words. He looks into a heart entirely simple-minded, true and humble ; a heart which

He might expect would carry away *His reply* as in effect the gracious fulfilment of the prayer, *come down*, though not in outward form.

Ver. 50. "*Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way, thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.*"

In general, when He was asked, the Lord would affably go to the sick, and would heal them by laying His hands upon them ; but in this case, He challenges forth the petitioner to a bold exercise of faith, and says, "Go thy way, thy son liveth." "This word, a healing herb, works two cures at once ; it restores health to the son ill of a fever, and it imparts strength of faith to the father, ill of weakness of faith" (Brenz). Truly, we have in this nobleman a noble example of growing faith. It seems to me that St. John expresses his own joyful surprise in delineating the man now suddenly become perfectly calm and content. "The man believes the word which Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way full of quiet assurance, so unconcerned as to *how* his son should be healed, his mind so occupied with Jesus, that he did not reach Capernaum (which was only about twenty English miles from Cana) until the next day ;—he felt quite certain of his child living ; if he could only feel as certain of a Saviour living for himself ! When, however, that step in faith is reached, which we read of in verse 50, then that which follows in verse 53 is very, very near.

Do we know anything of that calm content which takes possession of the soul, when it is able to mount aloft into a word which God has spoken, and in the obedience of faith to go its way. Or, think we God speaks less plainly to us than Jesus did to this nobleman ? Oh that we heeded His word ! We are in sorrow, or in some helpless embarrassment ; we cry to Him for deliverance—He is punishing us, our conscience says to us : "Ye came not to Him till now." Only this trouble is able to subdue your heart and to drive you into the arms of a Love which has long been waiting for you. We humble ourselves, we con-

time to pray, we pray more fervently. Then there falls a ray of light into the dark soul; some word of God, some promise of His grace, becomes quick to us; we hear *ourselves* spoken to by the lips of our God. But His way is not according to our thoughts, it is higher than ours. We have prayed too little. God is greater than our heart: "Open thy mouth *wide* and I will fill it" (Psalm lxxxi. 10). That is *His* way with us. That which we desired is not still to come to pass at some future time, for it has already taken place! "*Thy Son liveth!*" And what lives in the mind of God, lives *for us* in faith in His word. Should we through unbelief destroy again that which God's almighty love has called into life? If we refuse the living God the only honour which He looks for from sinners, the obedience of faith, then, on the one hand, it is not His mind to constrain us to see His glory, but, on the other also, He will not be forced to reveal it otherwise than in the unalterable order according to which the "*word*" *received in faith* is the only light to guide us on the path to sight. "But what is more blessed and happy than to believe His word, and to let no temptation force us from it, and against every temptation to do nothing but shut fast our eyes, lay aside sense and cleverness, reason and prudence, and steadfastly to say in our hearts: God has spoken, He cannot lie. There is nothing, I say, more joyful than such a faith" (Luther). And where there is this faith really hanging on God's word, He is wont to hasten gloriously to reward it.

Ver. 51. "*And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, Thy son 'liveth.'*"

Even whilst he was on the road he was to learn that the word was a right word which he had believed; he hears it echoed from the lips of his servants, who had traced on the child the all-powerful working of His word at the very moment that Jesus had spoken it.

We also sometimes meet with voices *on our way*, voices which come to us as an echo of our faith down from the kingdom of sight. I have heard of a *Colonel von M*——, who, on account

of treason to his king and country, was sentenced to a long imprisonment, and who, in his solitary cell at Galatz in Silesia, began at last to seek the living God, whose image had been for so long almost obliterated within him. He was allowed to have no book except his Bible, and though at first in reading it, his only feeling was inward rage and gnashing of teeth, yet by degrees he felt the soothing of God's tender hand on his desolate and comfortless heart. During a sleepless night, he suddenly feels for the first time since his childhood as if he could pray. He opens the Bible, and reads these words: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalm l. 15). Wherefore he calls upon God: "Lord, reveal Thyself to me, and deliver me from the misery of my unbelief." And it was granted to him to believe the word which God was speaking to him; the tender and unspeakably indulgent Lord who despises not the faintest movement of faith, had seen and had *rewarded* the coming to Him of this miserable man. He rises from his knees comforted, convinced in his conscience that a contact had taken place between his soul and the living God, and that, further, he should get to be able to glorify God. In that same night, the king of this Colonel lay on his bed tormented with pain. He prayed God for an hour of quiet sleep; he slept, and when he awoke again refreshed, he said to his wife: "God has looked upon me very graciously, and I would fain be thankful to Him for it. Who is the man in my dominions who has the most deeply injured me?—this day I will forgive that man." He considered a moment, and then he exclaimed, "*Colonel M*——. Let him be pardoned!" When the news of his release reached the prisoner, and the doubly pardoned man inquired the hour in which God had softened the king's heart, it was found that—the same God still lives as of old, and that He still performs through His outstretched right arm what we read in

Ver. 52, 53. "*Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the*

seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house."

"Oh, how necessary that we inquire and search into God's works and ways, especially that we search for them in the Scriptures without ceasing, but also after *that*, that we compare our hours of need and of help with each other, and give heed to all God's ways and dealings at this or that time, and how He has dealt, whether with us or with others. By this means we should learn to know the Lord better, and strengthen ourselves in faith. Yes, if we were only not so heedless, but took more note of every thing, we should then daily and hourly trace the forethought, the fidelity and the over-ruling government of God, for not an hour passes that the Lord does not confer some benefit upon us, and care for us both in body and soul" (Bogatzky). Yes, if we had clear eyes to discern God's *counsel* and *work*, we should then—as the same writer sings of His grace—

"The Scriptures of His grace behold,
Beaming to faith in words of gold
Continually in every place."

But here, "on our way," it is always only a foretaste that falls to our share of the blessed "knowing" which follows on believing the Word. When we shall have arrived in the glorious kingdom of sight, with unspeakable joy we shall hear from the mouth of holy angels, and of saints perfected before us, the echo of those words of God which were once the rod and staff upon which, in faith, we helped ourselves on our way; and in inquiring converse with the companions of our earthly pilgrimage, one light after another will rise before us, and throw its beams on the truth of our God—yes, when passed out of the *fore-courts* of the heavenly sanctuary, and entered into the most holy place of the glorified existence, we shall then "*know*" perfectly that God is true, that the Lord "is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him" (Ps. xcii. 15).

So long as we walk by faith, each lifting up of the veil which

hides the eternal and invisible from our mortal eyes, is designed for a *strengthening of our faith*. Thus was the faith of the nobleman now perfected. "*He believed*"—what did he believe? That through the word of Jesus his son lived? Rather, he had believed that before, and now *saw* it. No, he believed in Jesus, with that faith whereby we are saved, that He was really Christ his Saviour. He became a believer, and God gave him grace, so that not only the miracle-child of his house believed, but his *whole* house gave honour to God by an united act of faith, so that with regard to the life eternal it might now be said, "Thy house liveth." How richly can God reward, even here! This father had been deeply afflicted in tender solicitude for his dying child, and now his child, and he himself and his whole house, are healed for ever.

On every 21st Sunday after Trinity, when this Gospel is preached, let Christian fathers of families lay their hand upon the words, "*and himself believed and his whole house,*" and pray, "O Lord, let me also commend my house to thy care!" And furthermore, let us take a wider view, and remember "the house of God," which is the Church of the "living God" (1 Tim. iii. 15), and carry before the heavenly Householder the earnest prayer that He would impart grace to His poor Christendom, that there may be seen no longer any divided member, but that the one faith of the one house may enfold all in the bond of peace.

Let us once more glance over the blessed progress of the nobleman. He *heard*—he went and *prayed*—he came with the desire *to see*, but he *believed* the *word* before he saw, and went his way; he *knew* what he had believed—he became a *believer*, and now again he believed without seeing—he believed with his *whole house*. What the Saviour says to Thomas at the close of the Gospel history, "Blessed are they that have *not seen*, and yet have believed," here appears at the very beginning, in this second Galilean miracle, as the fundamental topic of that instruction to salvation whereunto the Gospel of St. John would fain help us.

Ver. 54. "*This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when He was come out of Judea into Galilee.*"

St. John relates three miracles in Galilee (as well as three in Judea): the first at the marriage in Cana, the second is this one on the nobleman's son, and the third on the multitude which Jesus fed in the wilderness (chap. vi). The revelation of the Lord's glory moves forwards both externally and internally; externally, for the marriage wine at Cana was only poured out to a modest company of Galilean wedding guests; but the nobleman with his whole house becomes a candlestick to show forth the light of Jesus in Galilee's capital, while the five barley loaves and two fishes were blessed for five thousand men; internally, for whilst in Cana the Saviour merely spoke of the *hour* for the revelation of His glory, to the nobleman He speaks of *faith* in this His glory, but to the people by the Sea of Galilee, He interprets the glorious sign of feeding the multitude in His holy discourse concerning the meat of life, which He Himself is. Jesus Christ is the Sun of Glory; every sign which He does is a beam from that sun; let us follow each separate beam with devout inquiring eyes, for then we shall always arrive again at the Sun; and this is the blessed fruit which the contemplation of the Gospel miracles is designed to bring to us.

Bethesda.

CHAPTER V. 1-15.

Lord Jesus, thou living Saviour, who bearest our pains and sicknesses, have mercy upon us. Amen.

As in the foregoing section, so likewise in this one, we shall see the glory of the Lord, as He revealed it in a *miracle*. St. John has not recorded many miracles; but those which he has recorded show forth Jesus' glory; and in doing so, it is the anxious desire of his love also to transmit to the Church the *words* of Jesus, because these teach us to understand His miracles in their character as signs of His glory. This he does from ver. 17 of the present chapter. The miracle of the sick man at Bethesda appears as a single drop out of that fulness of all-healing life which is contained in the Son of God, and which, through Him, is opened to all who are sick and dead. We must, then, listen attentively to His discourse, in order to learn from it the meaning with which He has Himself endued His outward act; and even now, whilst we are gathering round Him at the pool of Bethesda, let the subject of the discourse to which our narrative is an introduction, sound in our ears: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

Ver. 1. "*After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*"

It cannot be quite determined what feast is here meant. If instead of being *a* feast, it was *the* feast of the Jews, namely, the feast of the Passover, the Lord's purpose in going up to

Jerusalem was for the second time to confirm to the chosen people the covenant of the Passover, and to awaken in them a longing after that redemption, of which in the eating of the paschal lamb they celebrated the type. The sick man by the pool of Bethesda would then be by so much the more a striking image of the people of Israel; and in his illness of thirty-eight years would be found again those thirty-eight years during which the people wandered miserably in the wilderness, but the end of which, in the first Passover they celebrated in Canaan, shadowed forth the re-establishment of their covenant with the Lord, which had been broken. But if, on the other hand, the feast in question was the feast of *Purim* (which is more probable), the feast in remembrance of the deliverance of the Jews out of the hands of the heathen, recorded in the book of Esther, then the Lord went up to Jerusalem in order to show a marked contrast to the fleshly mind of the Jews, which was wont to display itself more particularly in Jerusalem at this feast, by visiting the Lazar house of Bethesda, and by finding His joy in gladdening the hearts of the poor and wretched (Esth. ix. 22). The Lord's appearance in the midst of the people just at the time of this feast, when in the midst of worldly pleasure they were forgetting the God who had so wonderfully preserved His chosen people, must have spoken to the consciences of any who were at all capable of feeling: "Do ye thus requite me, O foolish people and unwise?" At all events, whether this were the Passover, or the feast of Purim, or some other feast (according to many, it was the feast of Tabernacles), the question of the Saviour, "*Wilt thou be made whole?*" referred also to the people at large. Ah, how gladly would He, the great Physician, have healed *every* sickness (ver. 40)! But they *would not* come to Him that they might have life.

Ver. 2-4. "*Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.*"

For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water : whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."

The people of Israel, even in their deep humiliation, had yet in this healing pool a memorial of the Lord's former miracles, showing as a sign that He had not yet utterly forsaken the land (Ezek. ix. 9). Who could so beautifully have described this *Bethesda* (house of mercy, *charité*) and its power to heal, as John has here done? His eye has become keen in its habitual contemplation of heavenly mysteries, and thus he is able generally, under the veil of outward elements, to recognise the personal powers of the invisible world. The same John who in the Revelation hears the words of "the angel of the waters," the angel that represents the golden host of ministering spirits who stand ready at the Almighty God's command, either to bestow or to withhold the blessings of the fourth petition in the Lord's prayer—this same John is he also who here in his Gospel describes—as if his opened eyes had seen it—the coming down of one of these "angels of the waters" into the pool of Bethesda, for the healing troubling of its waters, for which the sick people were waiting in the five porches which surround it. Many among them no doubt attributed this healing property of the water merely to a so-called power of nature, as, for example, to a subterraneous fire, that caused the bubbling in the pool; but St. John knows that that *subterraneous* movement was under the guardianship and blessing hand of *super*-terrestrial angel-powers. If we had St. John's eyes, we should no doubt be aware, even at the present day, of this and of that salubrious spring opened by blessed angels, who rejoice in being employed by their Lord to tend upon the sick. Yes, instead of reading such a passage as this with surprise, it would cause us heartily and joyfully to sing (comp. Ps. xxxv. 5; xci. 11, 12):

" Thus even now from plague and ill
Doth God protect His converts still;
Bless'd angel powers He still doth send,
Watchers, to guard and to defend."

The Holy Scriptures know of no rigid laws of nature, into whose neutral power we are suffered to be handed over; but they bid us see the creation pervaded by the energy of the living God, whose will is executed by ministering spirits sent forth to minister for our salvation (Ps. ciii. 20, 21; Heb. i. 14). It was only the *first person* who immediately on the troubling of the water stepped down into the pool, that was cured of his disease: the troubling lasting only a minute, and he who did not hasten to make use of it came too late.

Ver. 5, 6. "*And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?*"

Only *one* angel descended at a *certain time* into the pool of Bethesda, and it was only the *first* who stepped down obtained a cure from the troubled water; but on the Son of man the angels of God descend without any cessation, and from Him heavenly powers of blessing go forth upon all who approach Him in faith. In Him has appeared the true Bethesda for both body and soul, and for this very purpose He now presents Himself at the pool of Bethesda, in order to reveal His glory, as the glory of the Son of God, of Him whom all angels serve. On the most wretched and the most helpless of all who are assembled in the porches His Saviour's glance falls. He *sees* him and He *knows* him. Not only had he counted the years of his sickness, but even the history of his life was disclosed to Him. As the poor man knew not that the Lord of Bethesda stood before him in Jesus, the Saviour in His condescension, unsolicited comes to meet him in the words: "*Wilt thou be made whole?*" Not so much a question as an exclamation of heartfelt compassion is that: "And thou too wouldst fain be made whole?" The tender word of Jesus fastens on the sick man's longing for recovery, seeking to awaken in his desponding heart the hope, which had perhaps become extinct within him, that he too might be helped in his distress. "In like manner, in all our

afflictions, whenever the Lord instils into our minds a longing for redemption, He is in fact asking us whether we would fain be redeemed; and this longing carries at the same time with it the conviction that it is not in our power to help ourselves, but that we must look to something else, viz., to the hand of the Lord, from whence alone all help comes, and for which we are in humble faith to wait" (Brenz).

Ver. 7. "*The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.*"

"I have *no man*:"—is it possible that *Thou* wilt fain do me the kind service which no one else is minded to do? Some such thought faintly stirs within the soul of the sick man, but he does not venture to express it. What he says breathes the feeling of general abandonment. He sighs, indeed, over the thought that he has no man to take any interest in him; but yet he utters no complaint against any one, neither does he murmur against God: we venture to answer for him that the thirty-eight years of sickness had not passed in his case in vain. He now clearly sees the connection between his *misery* and his *sin*; therefore it is that he is so unresisting, and knows not how to *require* that any one should come to his help,—yes, he does not venture plainly to ask even of Jesus to put him into the pool, but he *waits* to see whether perhaps in this kind friend of the sick, whose very look at him is so wonderfully comforting, the man may not have been sent to him, whom hitherto he had not met with. From such souls the merciful and gracious Lord cannot withdraw himself. He who can be prevailed upon by the anguished cry of a nobleman (chap. iv. 49), how could He close His heart to the silent entreaty of a poor, bashful sinner, resigned to his misery? Where *no man* would help, there the help of the Son of God interposed gloriously.

"None to the Lamb too vile appear.

What all avoid, what none can bear,

Are good enough in His esteem;

They need not fear to come to Him."

Ver. 8, 9. "*Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked.*"

Behold here how the Son *works*, and quickens whom He will. The time will come when all who are in their graves shall hear the voice, "Rise!" and forthwith shall rise: that the hour of this revelation of the Glory of the Son of God will come is as certain as that it even "*now was*" (ver. 25)—now, when the almighty word of the Living One called upon the sick man at Bethesda to rise, and he was immediately made whole.

"*Rise!*" The sick man hearkened to the words; in the faith which he had in the word which Jesus had spoken to him, he would fain be made whole: this word became his Bethesda, it was enough for him. He *believed* that he could rise at the Lord's command, and thus he was able to rise, and immediately felt that he was made whole; he *took up his bed*, the token of his thirty-eight years' infirmity, and walked—walked at freedom, without crutches. What strength is in this weak man made mighty! It may well be said of it, "My soul, which before sunk down to the very door of hell, now mounts up to the very glory of heaven." So gloriously, with such marvellous power, does faith suddenly burst forth in humble souls! But what does the bed tell us, which the healed man carried away? For thirty-eight years had his bed borne the sick man, now the healed man bears his bed of infirmity away: in like manner do converted sinners take the materials of their former conversation, and at the same time with joy and shame bear them as trophies of victory, but as reminders too; thus does the converted miser, for example, say to mammon, "Formerly thou hadst me, but now I have thee;" he takes his possessions and goes away ready to lay out all that he has to God's honour and service. But the bed of sickness, when it is turned into the restored man's trophy of victory, should also preach of the healing work of God.

Ver. 9, 10. "*And on the same day was the sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath-day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.*"

They knew well to whose honour the cured man carried his bed, and it was that which displeased them; otherwise they would hardly have placed the sick bed which the man was carrying home in the same class with the "wine-grapes and figs, and all manner of burdens" of those traders whom Nehemiah blames for their desecration of the Sabbath (Neh. xiii. 15, &c).

Ver. 11. *"He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk."*

When through His word He has made me whole, how can He not be entitled to have His word hearkened to by me? True, he knew not who Jesus was (verse 13); but he rejoiced in believing Him to be a Prophet, mighty before God, and he was convinced that in obeying His order he could never violate the third commandment of God, although he might not be following the petty inventions of men with regard to the Sabbath. Well for us, if we know how to overthrow all doctrines of men, which would entangle us in the yoke of bondage, by a joyful appeal to the word of Him who has made us whole unto eternal Life! Therein consists the freedom of a Christian man.

Ver. 12, 13. *"Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed and walk? And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place."*

Thus the Lord's miracle had no savour of life for them. Rather they wished to make out the Lord to be a *man* who, if He ever did work miracles, did them not in the name of God, because He did not honour the Sabbath. He that was healed did not know "the man." Before even he had time to ask the name of this Physician who did for him what *no* man could have done, Jesus had *conveyed Himself away*. He wished to make Himself known to the man, not within sight and hearing of the crowd, but alone with Himself as his confessor.

Ver. 14. *"Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and saith unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."*

Jesus found him in the *Temple* ; probably returning thanks for the miraculous mercy which God had bestowed upon him. The Lord rejoiced at this. But He also knows that men recovered from sickness are on the way to new and more grievous misery, unless the blessing received leads them to *repentance* (Rom. ii. 4). Therefore He speaks to the man three words which are to guide him on his way. "Attend to the order in which the words are placed. Christ places the exhortation in the middle, '*Sin no more!*' But He supports this exhortation both ways by powerful reasons ; in front, by the consideration of the received benefit, '*Behold thou art made whole?*' and behind, by the threat of a heavier punishment in case of sin, "*lest a worse thing come upon thee.*" (Chemnitz.)

What the man's conscience had already told him, viz., that his *sufferings* had been a *punishment of his sin*, he now sees expressly confirmed by the word of the Lord. It is true that holy scripture forbids us to conclude the amount of guilt from the amount of suffering (Luke xiii. 1 ; John ix. 1, and the whole tenor of the book of Job) ; but because all men daily sin grievously, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment, therefore no one, no faithful Christian even, ought to refuse to recognise in his sufferings a punishment of his sin. But yet every punishment, until the day of Grace is past, means not to destroy but to save ; and as soon as we can say from our hearts, "Strike. I have deserved it !" we shall change the angry strokes of the Holy God into the loving correction of a Father's hand.

And then when it is said : "*Behold, thou art made whole*"—when it pleases the tender compassion of God to revive us by removing our burden, then let us also distinctly hear the voice : "*Sin no more,*" and answer : "O Lord, give us in addition to the grace for which we praise Thee, the yet greater grace to perceive the purposes of Thy love towards us, and faithfully to fulfil them !" It is a dreadful thing, when the correction and the mercy of Divine love wearies itself with a man in vain. *Worse* than thirty-eight years sickness, perhaps worse in time,

but certainly worse in eternity, would it be for this man who had been made whole, if he had to live on in his old life without spiritual healing. Therefore, you that are sick, write over your beds when you rise up from them in renewed health : “ *Behold, thou art made whole ; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*” Comp. chap. viii. 11.

Ver. 15. “ *The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus which had made him whole.*”

Now he knew who it was that had made him whole. Until we have found the Physician of our souls in Jesus, the Physician of our body remains an unknown man to us. Where is he who could pray with faith : “ *Give us this day our daily bread,*” if the God who hears and answers the next petition : “ *Forgive us our trespasses,*” were a stranger to him ?

The man announces to the Jews the name of Jesus, as the name of Him (he says) *who had made him whole*, not as the name of a man who desecrated the Sabbath. He had no evil intention in giving them Jesus’ name. He had no other idea but that the rulers of the people could not fail to join heart and voice with him in praising this Jesus, who is greater than the good angel of Bethesda.

My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

CHAPTER V. 16-47.

(I.) THE WORKS OF THE FATHER AND THE SON (v. 16-29).

May the Lord, through His precious word, make known to us how great is the mystery of godliness: God manifest in the flesh! Amen.

THE Lord Jesus had manifested forth His glory through the miracle by the pool of Bethesda, and angels bowed down with adoration before the majesty which shone out through the flesh, in which dwelt the eternal Word. But men closed their eyes and hardened their hearts against the summons of their God and Saviour: Israel would not be made whole. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. lxxxix. 11)—so spake the Saviour's walk, scattering blessings among His people, so begged the miracle of love just now performed:—"but my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me!" Will the Lord now do as the complaint of His despised love goes on to say in the Psalms, "*So I gave them up* unto their heart's lust, and they walked in their own counsels?" Yes, the time will come when He will give them up: "I go My way, and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins" (chap. viii. 21). But He does not yet leave them. As yet He sues to win their souls with love's own urgent violence. In this word He unfolds before them the glory, of which the miracle of Bethesda was only a sign inviting their attention.

In the first part of His discourse which we are now about to

endeavour to explain, the Lord reveals to us the glorious secret of His *works*; their power springs from the glorious mystery of His *Person*: His working is simply the working of *God*; for the Son and the Father, two Persons, are of one Divine Essence; the original life of the Father is the like original life of the Son, and the life of the Son becomes the life of those who believe on Him. That which John in the commencement of his gospel announced of the eternal Word, the Light and Life of men, of sinners, we hear now from the lips of the Eternal Word Himself, who had become Flesh. We are admitted, then, to drink out of the same well from which John had drank, and to receive with him out of Christ's fulness, grace for grace.

Vers. 16, 17. "*And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*"

The Jews persecuted Jesus, and wanted to tie His hands from blessing on the Sabbath day; their blindness could not see in this Jesus the hand of God, which cannot be tied from blessing. "*My Father worketh hitherto,*" Jesus says. He who rested on the seventh day from His works of *creation*, works still, ever since He gave being to the first Sabbath *down* to the Sabbath which is here witnessed by the Jews, in works of *redemption*. "If He were not to work, where were then the Sabbath itself?" (Bengel.) God rests in His blissful enthronement above the world, which through His word is finished, and which proclaims His glory. He works by being present in the fulness of blessing in the midst of the world, which is upheld by the word of His power—preserved, saved, and glorified. Thus, according to the notion of the Jews, God Himself broke the Sabbath by His working. If thou wilt *not* break the Christian Sabbath, let God work in thee through His word, and do thou work the works of God in His strength, as Luther sings:—

"Busied with works no longer be,
That God may work His work in Thee."

and again—

“Thou shalt the Sabbath sanctify,
That I Myself may work in thee.”

If, then, the Father has worked hitherto, how should the Son not work? The Father, in fact, never works without the Son, the Eternal Word: through the Son He upholds the world thus created and replenished (Col. i. 17; Hebrews i. 3). Therefore Jesus says: “*And I work,*” I fulfil the Father’s work (chap. iv. 34). The works of the Father, *of* whom are all things, and the works of the Son, *by* whom are all things, are inseparable from each other, and the Sabbath’s work of love on the sick man by the pool of Bethesda was a sign of this united working of the Father and the Son for the salvation of men. “*My Father—and I:*” therein lies the proper gospel of this whole discourse. Had the Jews been minded to believe that Jesus is the *Son of God*, they would have praised and extolled His working as God, and would have prayed Him to make them whole unto life eternal. But the self-sufficient Pharisee felt no need of a God who, as Father and Son, was working hitherto, in order that He may rest anew in blissful joy over sinners through Him redeemed, for whose salvation He is still working through His Spirit until the dawn of the eternal Sabbath. The Gospel: “*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,*” was an offence to the Jews.

Ver. 18. “*Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*”

Jesus wrote on His forehead (said the Jews) a name of blasphemy, and therefore they sought to kill Him. But we bow the knee at the name of the *only-begotten* Son of His *own* Father. God is His *own* Son’s *own* Father: the whole Divine Being of the Father is the Son’s own. Therefore, the Lord does not say: *our*, but *My* Father; and the Jews are quite right in understanding in His words a meaning which

in the mouth of any other than the only-begotten Son, would certainly be blasphemy. Also the words: "*equal with God*"—equal with God in power and honour—are a true interpretation of the words: "*and I work;*" except only that the Jews accuse Jesus of taking to Himself what is not His due: *He maketh Himself* equal with God. Verily, *either* as the Son, who, like the Father, is very God, Christ is honoured, and thus honours Him in faith the whole Christian world upon earth; *or*, as a man, who *maketh* Himself equal with God, He is arraigned for blasphemy, and this He is by all unbelievers. May this *either* shine clear as the sun to the eyes of every reader of St. John's Gospel!

Ver. 19. "*Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.*"

The Son can do nothing of Himself: here the Lord answers the two-fold complaint of the Jews, that He was a breaker of the Sabbath, and that He made Himself equal with God. Christ is the *Son*: the Son born of the Father from eternity, who is in the bosom of the Father, and who *sees* what the Father does; the Son made Flesh, who full of grace and truth dwells amongst us, and reveals His glory in *doing* those things that He sees the Father do. Because He is the *Son*, for that very reason it is *impossible* that He should be doing any work which were not *also* the *Father's* work: rather it is just the Father's will and works that in the Son's will and works are revealed. The Father never works except through the Son, and the Son never works except from the Father. "Thy will be done,"—this was the holy motto of Jesus' walk in the time of His humiliation; He *could* do nothing but what He saw the Father do, because He could not *will* anything else. Thus it is in this, that the Son *can* do nothing of Himself, that the peculiar glory of the only-begotten of the Father is seen. To no created being belongs the honour which the Son of God ascribes to Himself in these words.

Neither the man nor the angel exists who could dare to say of himself: "*I can* do nothing of myself;" because no man's and no angel's self is essentially and inseparably one with the self of God. The creature can tear itself away from its Creator, and place its *I* in opposition to Him; it can seek its life in itself, instead of in Him, and it can act "in its own name" (chap. viii. 44); the Son of God, on the contrary, has nothing of His own, no self, which does not eternally contain the same life which the Father has.

Yet our blessed Lord will not retain for Himself only this His divine life. To this end He came in the flesh, that His life—the life of the *only*-begotten Son—should become the life of the *newly*-begotten children of God (chap. xvii. 23). To this end, as the Lamb of God He bore the sin of the world, everything that man had ever done of his own self—and made atonement for it. He who abides in Christ can also do nothing of Himself. He cannot sin, St. John says, because he is born of God (1 John iii. 9). But yet it is only in the kingdom of glory that the holy seed, out of which grows the perfect fulness of God in the hearts of believers (Eph. iii. 19), will work without any hindrance, and remain unimpaired in the children of God. Then will God be all in all (1 Cor. xv. 28): He will be all in those who are begotten again, as He is all in the Only-begotten; then will it be as true of the children of God through *grace*, as it is of the only-begotten Son by virtue of His divine *nature*, that they can do nothing of themselves, but what they see the Father do. But even then there will be this eternal difference between the doings of the only Son and those of the many children of God, that the Son does that which the Father does *in like manner*, as like and equal God in power and honour; whilst the children of God do, in the manner of privileged servants, that which the Father works in them.

In these first words of His discourse the Lord particularly had in view His act of healing by the pool of Bethesda; this (He intimates) He had done, not of Himself, which the Jews

accused Him of doing, but in union with the hitherto working Father; now, however, He proceeds further; it is only in the light of the 20th verse that the 19th verse is seen in its full power.

VER. 20. "*For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth: and He will shew Him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.*"

It is not, then, one single work that the Son sees the Father do, and does likewise, but *all things* that the Father does the Son does in like manner; and this undivided working of the Father and the Son is founded in *love*, i.e., in that which God is essentially. "*The Father loveth the Son.*" God is love: therefore in the Divine essence there is an eternal intercourse of love between one I and another I; the loving Father *shows*, and the beloved Son *sees*; the Father is blessed in showing and imparting all things that He is and does, and the Son is blessed in seeing and receiving the glory of the Father, which again He reveals in the flesh as His own, and imparts to those who believe on Him (chap. xvii. 22). For that which the Father does and shows to the Son whom He loveth, *that* the Son, doing with the Father, shows to the world which is beloved in Him. The Father keeps nothing secret from the Son, but rather imparts everything to Him, because He loves Him; and the Father reveals nothing to the world except through the Son, because it is only in the Son whom He "gave," that "He loves the world."

God's works, indeed, are known to Him, to the Father and to the Son, from "the beginning of the world;" but He does them one after another, ever rising from great works to greater. Therefore Jesus says: "*and I will shew Him greater works than these.*" He knows what works they are of which He speaks; for He has seen them from all eternity in the Father's bosom. But the Father *will* show them to Him, that He may reveal them and do them. They are *greater* works than *these* in which He has hitherto revealed the glory the Father had given to Him. Those who see these greater works of the Father and the Son shall

marrel, some with blessed rapture, others with endless horror and woe. For there is a time when *all* shall see the works of His glory. He will be glorified in all men : through the work of quickening in those who hear and believe His word, through the work of judgment on those who will not hear His voice and will not believe on His name. Of these two great works of God, the *work of quickening* and the *work of judging*, wherein all divine working finally perfects itself, the Saviour now goes on to speak.

Ver. 21. "*For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them ; even so the Son quickeneth whom He will.*"

Death is the wages of sin, and it has passed upon all men, because all men are sinners ; first it seized the living spirit and took possession of it, and through that it got the body also into its power. But the ever-living God is Lord over death : "*He raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them*" — *God the Lord* alone does this ; yet the Father does not do it without the Son, but the Son does it in oneness with the Father, as in oneness of being, so also in oneness of will : "*even so the Son quickeneth whom He will,*" not as Elijah or Elisha, who restored life to the dead by praying, but as Lord over life and death, as equal God in power and honour, does the Son quicken *whom He will* : He wills it, and it takes place, His will is the cause of life. "Young man, I say unto thee arise !" — "Talitha cumi !" — "Lazarus come forth !" — there we have interpreted the words : whom *He will*. Yet a Zaccheus, a Magdalene, and even the thief, are no less examples of this divine working of the Son. For not to the *body* alone does the Lord, who is the resurrection and the life, impart His likeness. In this 21st verse, both the *spiritual* and the *bodily* quickening are alike included, the precious raising up from death in sins, and the subsequent raising up from the death of corruption. The *former* then is expressly brought forward in verse 24 and 25, the *latter* in verse 28 and 29. Those whom it is the Lord's will to quicken, pass from death unto life ; but those whom it is not

His will to quicken—and He will not quicken *those* who withstand Him through unbelief (ver. 24)—those remain in death, and shall not see life. And that is their judgment.

Ver. 22. “*For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.*”

The Father quickens no man but through the Son, and therefore, also, He *judges* no man, delivers up no man to remain in death, but through the Son. All grace unto life flows to us through the Son, and, indeed, through the Son made flesh : He is the Author of our salvation. But all judgment unto death also is given to the Son, and indeed to the Son of Man (ver. 27) : to those who do not obey Him He shall be an Author of condemnation. The Father hath given all things into the hand of the Son ; by His decision all is determined, whether for their fall or for their rising again. He who receives Jesus receives life ; he who despises Him despises life (1 John v. 12), and will be, ay, *is* already condemned because he has not life. The Father hath committed *all* judgment unto the Son : not the *last* judgment only, but all the works of divine judgment which, through all time pursue their majestic course, fulfilling their awful career ; and as often as the loud voice sounds anew, “ Fear God, and give glory to him, for *the hour of his judgment is come* (Rev. xiv. 7 ; comp. Isa. l. 11), so often does the Son of God reveal His glory anew. “ Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way ” (Ps. ii. 12), applies to every individual soul as well as to princes and their people. The blessing or curse of a people depends on its behaviour towards the Son of God, whether as a nation, in its customs and laws, it gives Him or withholds from Him the honour which is His due. But be of good cheer, ye pious, and strengthen your hearts. The sceptre of the ungodly shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, for *all judgment is committed to the Son.*

Souls sorely beset, which feel their sins and fear God’s judgment, ought to cling fast to this saying, that all judgment is committed to the Son. God, truly, is none otherwise minded

towards thee, than He shows Himself to be in His Son; He does not use double measures and weights, but He holds thee for what thou weighest before Him, when weighed according to the all-availing weight of His dear Son's blood; only in Christ art thou weighed, not out of Him. What thou findest thyself in Christ through faith, such thou art also before God; for the Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (Brenz).

The Father not without the Son, the Son not without the Father; this is the ever resounding key-note of this discourse, in which the secret is plainly revealed of the eternal Word, who was with God, and was God, and who became flesh. The utterance that now follows, coming from the lips of Him who was lowly in heart, comprises the whole import of the passage from verse 19-22.

Ver. 23. "*That all men should know the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him.*"

"If I honour myself, my honour is nothing; but it is my Father that honoureth me, of whom ye say that He is your God—and know Him not" (chap. viii. 54). His honour and glory—which God will give to *no other* who is not God (Isa. xlii. 8)—the Father has given to the Son to reveal it to men, that thus God may be honoured, the *Father* in the *Son*, when every knee bows to the name of Jesus, and every tongue confesses that *Jesus Christ* is *Lord to the glory of God the Father*. The Jews spoke of the one true God as their God, and thought they honoured Him; but they knew Him not; for God is only known where men acknowledge both the Father and the Son; He is only honoured where men honour the Son; for Him God has sent out of His bosom to become Flesh, that He might be the revealer of His hidden nature. We pray, "Our Father;" but our prayer only enters the Father's heart when we pray to Him in the *name of Jesus, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. To call upon God as our Father, except in Christ, is only to call upon an idol, upon an invention of our own thoughts. What

his Master with such power and earnestness testifies in this utterance, has all along been present to the mind of St. John. His epistles show this. "Whosoever denieth the *Son*, the same hath not the *Father*" (1 John ii. 23); "whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, *hath not God*. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath *both the Father and the Son*" (2 John 9); and what is the warning with which his first epistle ends: "Little children, keep yourselves from *idols*," but a confirmation of the testimony of Jesus, that the true God is only known and worshipped as the Father in the Son? The holy apostle consigns to the class of idols every image of the Godhead which is designed by our own imaginations, and is set up in the place of Him who is the only true God—viz., the Father of Jesus Christ.

This 23d verse was written in *Luther's* soul in letters of fire. It is with him the fundamental notion of the Gospel, the notion which stamps its impression in every possible way in his discourses—that "out of Christ there is nothing else but idolatry and man's false imaginings of God." "I have often said it, and I now say it again, that if any one wishes to know God, and to speculate about God without risk of error, let him look into the manger, and begin below, and learn first to know the Son of the Virgin Mary, born at Bethlehem, as He there lies a suckling in His mother's bosom, or as He hangs on the cross; thereafter he will know truly who God is. This knowledge of God will then not be terrible, but the most precious and comforting. And beware of high soaring thoughts of climbing up to heaven without this ladder, viz., the Lord Jesus Christ in His human nature. Such as the Word represents Him in pure simplicity, to that do thou keep, and let not reason draw thee from it; and *thus thou wilt lay hold of God aright*" (comp. chap. xiv. 16).

Twofold is the honour which God provides for Himself in the children of men; they become the vessels of His honour, either by being quickened through His grace, or by being judged through His wrath. All men shall in the end honour God, the

true God, the Father and the Son: those who refuse to bow down before Him as sinners needing grace, and to honour Him as the Saviour who saves them from their sins, these enemies of His honour in Jesus are made the footstool of His feet; in misery shall they honour Him, by enduring righteous condemnation.

But hear how Jesus makes to all the offer of life! how He entreats them not to refuse to hear His voice! From none will He withhold the means of grace; and those means will lead all who will submit to its powerful working to that blessed honouring of the Son which is rendered by faith.

Ver. 24. "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.*"

Here, then, we are amid the clear shining of the sweet light which so unceasingly streams forth from St. John's Gospel—*Word, Faith, Life*; upon these three thoughts hinges everything that St. John had heard from the lips of the Son of God, and here makes known to us. "Here the Lord Jesus Christ begins to direct us on our way to the saving use of this doctrine which He has been delivering, of the undivided working of the Father and the Son; and we should give good heed to it, in order that we may not lose ourselves in barren speculations. He commences with His *word*. For it is through the word that He deals with us; it is through the word that He offers Himself and His blessings to us, and imparts Himself to our souls; the word is held forth before faith, that it may therein take hold of Christ and His merits. Next the Gospel is called the Word of *Life*; it is the word of salvation, the power of God unto salvation to all them who believe: and all this is founded on the holy doctrine which we have just been hearing from the lips of the Lord Jesus. For the power of the Gospel and of faith therein springs from this, that this Gospel is the word of Him who is of one nature and will, and of equal wisdom, might,

and honour with God the Father. In this word the Son of God is present, and faith in this word lays hold on Him who, like the Father, quickens whom He will, who hath life in Himself, in order that, by means of the word, He may impart it to us" (Chemnitz).

He that heareth my *word*, says the Lord, who Himself is the substance of His word. All His words, and all the words of His apostles (for he who hears *them*, hears *Him*), are in effect *one word*, the revelation of the eternal and incarnate Word; just as every sunbeam which our eye follows, leads on to the sun, so every single word of Christ received in faith conducts us into the fulness of grace and truth which resides in Him. But the blessing of *hearing* depends on the *faith* of those who hear (Heb. iv. 2). The quickening power of the word offers itself to all, but it is only experienced by those who do not obstinately withstand it, but allow the gracious operations of the word heard to overcome the opposition which their carnal mind naturally has to the life. These get to believe, and with full assurance their faith fastens on the gospel, *that the Father sent the Son* for the Life of those that were lost. Thus in the words, "and beheveth in *Him that sent me*," the Lord expresses at once the whole substance of faith. *Faith* means, as *Brenz* beautifully says, *to live in death*; or as before has been said by St. Paul: "As *dying*, and behold, we *live*" (2 Cor. vi. 9). Faith can boldly reverse the words of the old saying, "Even in the midst of life we are in death," and sing, "Even in the midst of death we are in life." For he who believes *has eternal life*, because he is joined as a member to the Lord and Possessor of life, and *comes not into condemnation*, because he has come out of the judgment of *death* in which he was as a sinner, and together with the Son of God who was given for him, He has gone forth and *passed into the life*, the life in which the Son of God, the Prince of Life, triumphs for ever over death and hell. Who will condemn us, if He unto whom all judgment is given justifies us?

“In Jesus Christ I can rejoice,
 A hero's strength can feel;
 In Him no judgment dare I dread,
 Which sinners else must kill.”

From death unto life: this great journey Christians have accomplished. Since the life of Jesus has soared up aloft through death, death has no longer any sting to destroy them who in Jesus are justified and quickened. It is true, they are still writhing in “the body of this death” which, as sinful flesh, is due to judgment (Rom. viii. 10); but because by means of justification they have within passed out of death into life, the death of their vile and wretched body will neither damage nor interrupt their life, but from the moment of their death in the Lord, they will be blessed (Rom. xiv. 13), and will see what until then they were happy in believing; and even their body will soon (for a thousand years with the Lord are but as one day) pass out of death into life and, as *the body of this life*, will clothe them gloriously (ver. 29). What the Lord says in this precious promise to believers, is far beyond all reason, and therefore He again impresses it with His *amen*, to which the Father adds the other *amen*.

Ver. 25. “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*”

He who hears the words of Christ, and in the Son believes the Father who draws to the Son, has eternal Life; with him that resurrection and quickening which is the gracious work of the Father and the Son, has already taken place, he *is passed from death unto life*.” This blessed time, the time of the fulfilment of Ezekiel (xxxvii.), when *the dead hear the voice of the Son of God*, and from death in their sins are transformed into life in their Redeemer this time is now come (2 Cor. vi. 2). It had already dawned when Jesus spoke these words; for the first-fruits of those redeemed from death unto life, were already surrounding the Prince of Life, and were confessing that

He had the words of eternal life (chap. vi. 68). But not till *then* did the gracious hour of the New Testament shed abroad its full blessing upon those dead in the world, when *the voice of the Son of God*, who was dead and is alive for evermore, resounded in the Gospel of the finished redemption. From that time until now the dead have heard the summons to life (Eph. v. 14 ; Rom. iv. 17), and have experienced *the same operation* of the mighty power of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, “which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places” (Eph. i. 17, &c. ; comp. Rom. viii. 11.) This voice, the voice of the Son of God who for me, out of His own life went into my death, but was taken out of prison and judgment—who will declare His length of days!—this high-priestly voice of my Saviour, which knows well the mysteries of my death, pierces through every thing, and by the “*Ephphatha!*” of His mighty Love makes itself heard by me.

“*And they that hear shall live.*” The Son of God quickens whom He will ; but *those* He wills to quicken who hear His voice and *give ear* to it as the voice of the Son of God, thereby being led by repentance to give up sin, the cause of death, and by faith to lay hold on the Author of Life. *This* is what is here meant by *hearing*. Many indeed hear the alluring voice of the Gospel—the light of eternity will reveal that *no one* has been passed over by its call—but they do not hear it as the voice of the Son of God, for to Him they will not come (ver. 40), because they prefer the darkness of death to the Light of Life. But the Lord’s discourse dwells rather upon the redeemed and joyful hearers of His quickening voice ; they are to know that they have in Jesus an all-sufficient Saviour, and in the Life which Jesus has and imparts, the true Life of the living God.

Ver. 26. “*For as the Father hath life in Himself ; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself.*”

I know and steadfastly believe, nor blush to proclaim it aloud, that God, the Most High God, the All-holy and Good, is my

Friend and my Father ; for the life to which the voice of Jesus Christ has raised me is the life, not of a creature, but of the most High God, the Creator, of Him who hath Life in Himself, who quickens all things (chap. vi. 57 ; 1 Tim. vi. 13). Creatures have no life of their own, no life in themselves, it is in God who giveth to all life and breath (Acts xvi. 25, 28), it is even *in Him* that we all live and move and have our being ; but the Son of God, on the other hand, has life in *Himself* just as the Father has life in Himself ; His being is Life ; He *is* Life (chap. xiv. 6), with God,—with the Father, and equally so with the Son—with God is the well of life (Psa. xxxvi. 9) ; but with every thing besides which lives, whether in heaven or in earth, there is but a *brook* which has issued out of this Well. The Person of the Father is distinguished from the Person of the Son, for the Father has Life *of Himself*, while the Son has Life *from the Father* ; and there never was a time when He had not life, for He was *in the beginning* with God, and in Him was life. But their Persons, though distinct, are of one Substance, for the Father and Son have alike originally life *in themselves*. “See, in this alone are they distinct from each other, that One is the Father, and the Other the Son.” (Chrysostom.)

Why does the Lord reveal to us these depths of the Godhead ? “These things I say, that ye might *be saved*” (verse 34), is His own answer to the question. It is not, then, as if we could *comprehend* and take in such mysteries with the span of our understanding, but our faith is to *apprehend* and lay hold on the consolation which is rooted in the true Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our hope is to cast her anchor upon ground deep and immoveable.

“God is the Lord, the Lord is One ;
Nought to Him’s equal save the Sou :
Whose throne abides through endless years,
Whose constant life no change impairs.”

The life to which the dead are raised up by Christ, is truly

life *eternal*, for it streams forth from the original Fountain-head of Life which the eternal Son has in Himself as well as the eternal Father. And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us: then the hidden well of life was brought near and opened to us, and now we receive out of its fulness grace for grace unto life. In the Son of God, who is *Jesus, the Son of man*, we have a fountain of salvation and life opened to us against sin and death. And so also the discourse of the Lord soon descends from the unapproachable heights where the well of life rises in eternity, down into our valley, where it flows within reach of men, of sinners:—the Glory of the *Son of man* shines forth.

Let me yet quote a passage from Augustine on this verse,—“Where hath a Paul life? Not in himself, but in Christ; “for he says: I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. ii. 20). Our life *as* our own, proceeding from our own will, can only be bad, sinful, and unrighteous; holy life is given to us by God. But it is not thus with the Word, the Son of God. If He had life by participating in God’s life (like us), He could at some time lose life, and be without life; but the Father has begotten the Son that He should have life in Himself. But thou, O my soul, wast dead, thou hadst lost Life: hear now the Father in the Son. Arise, and receive anew the life which thou hast *not* in thyself, from Him who *has* it in Himself.

Ver. 27. “*And hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.*”

He who has in Himself life and the power of life, has also essentially dwelling within Him the power of judgment (v. 22). Yet this verse has one consolation more than the 22nd. Power to quicken, the Son of Man possesses, because He is, at the same time, the Son of God; power to execute judgment the Father, who judges no man, has given to the Son of God, *because He is also the Son of Man*. It is *as the Son of Man*, who knows well by experience what human nature is, and who can sympathise with our weakness which He Himself felt in the flesh of His

humiliation, for He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. ii. 17, 18 ; iv. 15), it is as the *Son of Man* that Christ is the Judge of men. Were it otherwise, we might well despair. God’s judgment, unendurable to sinners, the guiltless Lamb of God has endured,—and as we see by faith all the punishment of our sin laid upon Him, and all the guilt of our sin expiated through His blood, so He sees in us His life and His righteousness. The *Man* through whom God has determined to judge the world with righteousness (Acts xvii. 31), *is* our Righteousness. The judgment which Christ *endured* for us, will not let us come into the judgment which He *executes* ; and though there must, indeed, be judgment (for certainly *all* shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ), yet we shall not *perish* in judgment, because He who has authority to execute it, sits on the judgment-seat as the Lamb, with the marks of His holy wounds upon Him which we ourselves bear also (Gal. vi. 17), as being with Christ crucified and risen. Our fate *is* already decided ; our process with Him who hath the power of death has been long ago gained ; the sentence of life has been already made out for us : at the last day it will be *revealed* only that we are released from the condemnation of death through the voice of the Son of God, to whom the Father hath given this authority because He is the Son of Man.

This is the consolation which believers derive from this passage. But for unbelievers, of all the horrors of judgment the greatest horror is this, that He who shall execute it is the Son of Man. “Behold He cometh with clouds (to judgment), and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him ; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him” (Rev. i. 7). In the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews we read that the terrors of Mount Sinai are far surpassed by the terrors which, from the Sion of the New Jerusalem, will fall upon those who despise the blood of Christ. “Our God is a consuming fire”—this consuming fire will go forth from the face of Jesus, the Son of Man, for then He shall be revealed with His mighty angels,

in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them *who know not God in Him*, and who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. i. 7, &c.) “*Ye would not !*”—this bitter cry of the Saviour’s love, despised and trodden under foot, coming forth from the lips of the Son of Man, will make the eternal destruction of the lost appear in the light of simple justice.

The Son of Man, this Jesus, to have authority to execute judgment! This was a hard saying to the Jews. They *marvelled* with the cold, contemptuous wonder of unbelief, for they perceived nothing of the quickening power of His word; the fact that their inward death and the peacelessness of their souls was the beginning of that judgment which Jesus was even then executing upon them, did not come home to them. Alas, how many there are, even now, from whose eyes the authority which Jesus Christ has to quicken and to judge, is hid, and who *marcel* when it is preached to them! The answer in the next verse concerns them.

Ver. 28, 29. “*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.*”

The emphasis lies on “*all*.” To the voice of the Son of God, which in the Gospel and by the voice of His ministers is calling dead sinners to life in the forgiveness of sins—to this, man can refuse obedience; and many there are who do stop their ears to this gracious voice, but to the voice of the Son of Man appearing in glory, which will resound from the mouth of the Archangel (1 Thess. iv. 16), and pierce even unto the graves—to this none can refuse to attend: *All, all shall hear it and come forth*. Fearful hour! Then will those who have despised the life which was so graciously offered to them shrink with horror from the resurrection of their body, and will say to the mounds under which they are buried, “Cover us!” (Luke xxiii. 30)—but in vain, they shall *come forth*, and thus honour the Son

who judges them. Whilst the bodies of those who have fallen asleep in the faith of Jesus shall come forth out of the graves as bodies of life, worthy to clothe the blessed souls which have been already partakers of eternal life, those who have died in unbelief shall come forth out of the graves forms of bodily death, bodies capable of receiving perfectly and for ever that bitter judgment of death which has already fallen upon their miserable souls. As co-heirs of the life to which they who have been quickened from the death of sin have passed, their *bodies* shall come forth out of the graves unto the *resurrection of life*; as alike bound to the judgment to which they are condemned who have remained in the death of sin, their *bodies* shall come forth out of the graves unto the *resurrection of condemnation*. The resurrection of life will glorify the body of the saved, that it may be made like unto the glorified body of Christ (Phil. iii. 21). The eternal shame and contempt (Dan. xii. 2) to which the resurrection of condemnation will sentence the unprofitable body of the lost has its fearful type in the suffering body of Jesus Christ, in which He, as being made a curse and sin, endured for us the pains of hell.

“*They that have done good*” are represented in these words of Christ as coming forth to the resurrection of life with joy (Matt. xxv. 34, 35); full of woe do they who have done evil come forth to the resurrection of damnation. The connection of the discourse plainly shows that *faith* in the former case is the root from which grew the *doing good*, and that in the latter the *doing evil* sprung from *unbelief*: yes, faith is itself the fundamental doing of good, that doing which is the result of God’s own working in us, in the case of those who have passed from death unto life (chap. vi. 29; 1 John iii. 23); and unbelief is itself the fundamental doing of evil, that doing which is in hostility to God, in the case of those remaining under the condemnation of death (1 John v. 16). “He that doeth good is of God, but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (3 John 11). He who, by receiving the word in faith, has been quickened to the

life of the Son of God, in him is, surely, found with Christ the living source of all good: his innermost will, his *I*, has become one with the Divine will in doing good and abhorring evil, so that St. Paul, whilst sighing over the sin yet working in "the body of this death," can yet say: "Now then it is no more I that do it (evil), but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. vii. 17). But he who does not believe, and who therefore has no life in God, his innermost will, his *I*, is one with the enmity of his flesh against God, he is carnally *minded* (Rom. viii. 5-7), and in doing evil he must say, "It is *I* that do it, being, as I am, a lover of sin which dwelleth in me." It will be the eternal joy of those who have risen to the resurrection of life, that, as possessors of a body wholly lighted up with the blessed life of the Holy Ghost, they will be able, in glorious freedom from all the bands of the body of death, to *do good* without ceasing; but it will be the eternal torment of those who have risen to the resurrection of damnation, that, as prisoners in a body which is wholly darkened by the frightful power of death, and is bereft of every feeling of life, they will feel without ceasing their old thirst for *doing evil*, but will never be able to appease it.

The doctrine of the resurrection of damnation, which has unequivocal authority in Scripture (both here and in Acts xxiv. 15, also 2 Cor. v. 10), is seldom seriously considered. And yet, it is salutary that we allow it to affect our minds. It is only in the light of this doctrine that the declarations which Scripture makes respecting the condition of the lost can be understood in all their painful weight; it is only in the light of this doctrine that such passages as, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness *of the flesh* and *spirit*, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. vii. 1), can ever exercise their complete purifying power.

(II.) THE FATHER'S WITNESS OF THE SON, V. 30-47.

O Lord God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, rule our hearts, that we may receive in faith the witness which Thou hast borne to Thy dear Son, and may set to our seal that Thou art true. Amen.

IN the first part of the holy discourse, in the explanation of which we are now engaged, the Lord, in answer to the accusations of the Jews, has vindicated His working as being the actual working of *God*: He *works* as the Father does, because He *is* as the Father. It is in the Fountain-head of being that the stream of works takes its rise. The divine life reveals itself in divine deeds, both in love and in wrath, both in *quicken*ing and in *judg*ing. But in the second part of this discourse the Lord now accuses the Jews. He brings before their eyes the *witnesses* which had been graciously vouchsafed to them, in order that they might therefrom see the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father, which was now present before them, while also with deep sorrow He rebukes their unbelief: "*and ye will not come to me that ye might have life*" (ver. 40). All particular witnesses concerning the nature of the Son and concerning His working in the power of the Father, which prepare the *way* for Him in every heart capable of receiving Him, are included in one general witness—in *the Father's witness of His Son*. Through Christ's immediate forerunner *John*, through the *works* given to Christ to do, and which announced Him as the Saviour, and through the *Scriptures* (ver. 37-49, 45-47)—through all these the Father witnesses of the Son.

The Lord first takes up again the point from which His discourse had originally started, and boldly repeats now in the first person what in verse 19 He said of the Son in the third.

Ver. 30. "*I can of Mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I*

judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me."

These words look both *backwards* and *forwards*. All His works, even the final work of judgment, the Son does, not separated from the Father, but in oneness of being and of will with Him; therefore they are inviolable and just; and what of a judicial character He at this very time speaks, that we should hearken to as coming from the lips of God, and as being as just and true as God is just and true. Whatever the Son *sees* the Father do, He does likewise (ver. 19), and as He *hears* the Father judge so He judges likewise. There never has been any self-prompted aim making the will of the Son who came into the world as the Saviour, divergent from the saving will of the Father (comp. Heb. x. 5-10). All the temptations of the Devil which he endured in the flesh aimed at this, to separate His will from the will of the Father, who had sent Him to be thus as He appeared and no otherwise. To raise in the holy soul of Jesus a will different from His Father's will, was what the Devil tried to do in the desert; and again in Gethsemane, when the terrors of death and hell fell upon the Living and Just One, the adversary of our redemption concentrated all his strength upon the last assault, to force Jesus to say: "*I will not drink this cup!*" But the prince of this world came and had nothing in Him, found nothing of an earthly mind in Him, no touch of *self-seeking*, by which he might catch hold of Him and make Him his own; "*For I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*" And this the Lord proved even now. It was indeed a painful office which He was at this moment discharging. He might, surely, have rejoiced in the adoration of holy angels, but because the Father had sent Him to sinners who should be saved through Him (ver. 34), therefore He heeded not the insult with which the Jews recompensed His love, but made it His meat to do the will of His Father, and sought to win over His gainsayers to the obedience of the truth.

The Lord knows the thoughts of the Jews, that they rejected His foregoing witness respecting His divine Person and His divine working, because, as they deemed, He was appearing as a false witness in His own cause. Entering, then, into their feeling, He says:

Ver. 31. "*If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true.*"

If Jesus had *in that sense* borne witness of Himself in which the Jews thought He did, His witness would, it is true, have had no infallible certainty of itself; for all men are liars. But it is impossible that the Son of God should bear any witness of Himself which He has not seen and heard in the bosom of the Father (ver. 19, 30); therefore on the other side He says: "*Though I bear record of Myself, yet My record is true; for I know whence I came and whither I go.*" Here, however, it is His design to speak as a man, and to take away from His accusers every excuse for their unbelief, "speaking to them (as Chrysostom observes) from their point of view." Then He proceeds thus:

Ver. 32. "*There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which He witnesseth of Me is true.*"

Another than ye say that I merely am! The Jews held God to be of a different *nature* from Jesus Christ, and on that account, they neither knew God nor Christ. But he who knows the true God because he *is* in Him through the grace of Christ, makes his joyful confession:—

" His name is Jesus Christ!
The Lord of hosts is He!
Nor other God can be!"

The Father is indeed one, and the Son another (the Holy Ghost also is another, ch. xiv. 16), for the Divine life of love is an eternal and real life precisely by virtue of the personal distinction of the Father, Son, and Spirit; but the Other who bears witness of the Son (as the Other, who is the Comforter, glorifies the Son in us) is of one substance with the Son in one

Godhead. This oneness of the Son with that "Other," the Father, who bears witness of Him, shines forth immediately afterwards in the words: "*I know that the witness which He witnesseth of Me is true.*" He knows it, for the purport of the witness is the same as that of His own knowledge of Himself (ch. iii. 11 ; viii. 55). And we also then first know that God's word is truth, when in the obedience of faith we surrender ourselves to it, so that the Holy Spirit in us bears witness to the Spirit in the word, that *that* Spirit is truth (1 John v. 6).

Let us now follow one by one the steps of this Divine ladder of virtues, upon which Israel should have ascended to faith in the Son of God and to the blessed contemplation of His glory.

Ver. 33, 35. "*Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man; but these things I say that ye might be saved. He was a burning and shining light* (the burning and shining lamp), *and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.*"

John came, sent by God, as a witness to bear witness of the light, that all men through Him might believe (chap. i. 7); and the Jews, partially aroused from their slumber of security, really did send to the preacher in the wilderness, and heard from his lips *a witness for the truth* (this witness we find in ch. i. 19, &c.) Jesus knows that John's witness is true, but *the* John in whom the Jews desired to rejoice was too insignificant a person for Jesus to borrow the testimony from him which the Father only could competently bear concerning Him. "*I receive not testimony*, the testimony which I mean (ver. 32), *from a man.*" Not the human *messenger*, but the Divine Sender it is that gives to John's testimony its dignity. If the Jews had been willing to listen to John's preaching as a Divine preaching (as the disciples did who suffered themselves to be led through him to the Son and Lamb of God), they might have been *saved* through it; yes, the Lord even now recalls to their memory the voice of His messenger for this very end, in order to revive the slight impressions which their hearts had

really received from it, *that they might be saved.* For Himself, the Lord had no need of any witness uttered through human lips ; but *for the sake of the salvation of men* He did not disdain “ a man sent by God,” as a witness that He had been sent from the bosom of His Father. “ Therefore it is that God does not deal with us in His Church without means, nor even through the instrumentality of angels, but through the office entrusted to *men*, in order that through His power becoming, as it were, kindred with ourselves, we might the sooner be brought to believe and be saved. Let us acknowledge and praise this His goodness, whereby He makes Himself thus near to us, and lets Himself down to our weaknesses, in the arrangements of His holy economy not considering the splendour of His own Majesty, but only our salvation.” (Chemnitz.)

The Lord points out the second Elias by a name familiar to the Jews. In Ecclus. xlviii. 1, it is said : “ Then stood up Elias, the prophet, as fire, and his word burned like a lamp.” Now, John was the true Elias, *THE burning and shining lamp*, which, kindled by the eternal Light, was to light the people of Israel along the way of salvation. Just as Christ was not *a* Light, but *the* Light, so John was not *a* lamp, but *the* lamp ; he was the friend and servant of the Bridegroom, who was to go before Him with the torch of his testimony. *Burning* like fire, his call to repentance penetrated into the hearts of men ; brightly *shining*, full of Gospel truth, he went before, lighting the way which led to the Lamb of God. But the main body of the people, the “ Jews ” as a whole, were not willing to rejoice in the bright shining of his preaching ; it was a preaching which would cheer none save only such sinners as had first submitted patiently to the burning fire of the Divine exhortation to repentance. They were merely willing “ *or a season to rejoice in his light.*” As of old Ezekiel was to his people, who boasted of their prophets but were disobedient to their words, so John could only be to the Jews “ a very lovely song of one that had a pleasant voice and could play well on an instru-

ment" (Ezek. xxxiii. 36). John's light they were willing to use, not to enlighten their poor souls, but merely to illuminate their Judaism, which for a long time previously no prophet had glorified. But when John's joy was reaching its fulfilment, their entertainment was over; when the Bridegroom's voice was heard, discoursing in other wise than the Jews in their carnality wished to hear from their Messiah, then they despised the clear lamp of testimony which, in the person of John, God had placed in their midst.

The meaning of these words of the Lord very closely concerns ourselves. For in the "burning and shining lights" which here and there in our times the Lord in mercy sends to a people sunk in the darkness of the world, may we not see before our very eyes John appearing again? And have not the thoughtless Jews, unconcerned about sin and the forgiveness of sin, their miserable successors in those men of the world who are willing for a time to bask themselves in the honour of being the admirers of some celebrated preacher? Oh, may the Lord have mercy upon us, and give to His band of evangelists crowds of hearers who shall be willing, not "to rejoice for a while," but to be saved for ever through the Divine word which is preached in their hearing!

Ver. 36. "*But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me.*"

All God's works are *great*—as manifesting *Him* all are alike great, because they are all perfectly worthy of Him: the voice which will summon all the dead from their graves, and the voice which spoke to the sick man at Bethesda: "Rise, take up thy bed and walk"—are both equally great, because they both belong to the same divine power and glory. He speaks and it is done. But *for us*, there are amongst God's works and witnesses *great* and *greater* and *greatest* (comp. ver. 20), since step by step they disclose the glory of God more fully before our eyes. In this

sense, the witness which the Father bears of the Son in the *works which He has given Him*, is greater than the witness which He sent John the Baptist to proclaim. John himself did indeed meet with an hour of temptation, when he held the works of Christ *not* as greater but as *less* than his witness of Him (Matt. xi.) But to comfort him, the Lord referred him to these very works, into the inner meaning of which, full of Gospel grace and truth, He bade him penetrate, in order that he might be raised above all offence, and with a fulfilled and holy joy see in the Doer of these works Him who should come, and of whom he had borne witness.

From this, then, we understand to what sort of *works*, given to Him by the Father, the Son of God here appeals. All His works one by one—as well the public “signs and wonders,” as the silent manifestation of His “Jesus name” in the inward life of sinners saved through Him (ver. 24); as well the teaching full of grace of the whole of His holy life (ver. 20), as the life full of grace of all His holy words—whatever He did as Physician both of body and soul, whatever He suffered as Lamb, whatever He said as Shepherd: they all combine together to form one bright revelation of His glory, and to *finish* the one work which the Father has given the Son to do (chap. iv. 34; xvii. 4). They are the *works* of Jesus Christ appertaining to His proper *vocation*, the works of God’s Anointed One. But the particular works which the Saviour had hitherto already done amongst His people, and to which the Jews are here more immediately referred, do in effect and virtually involve all subsequent works (ver. 20). So much greater as is now the fulfilment than the promise, so much greater is the witness of the works which Christ was doing than John’s witness of Christ’s works which were yet to come.

The works of Christ are a *witness of the Father to the Son*. The Son, indeed, can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do; what the Father doeth, *that* the Son doeth likewise (ver. 19), and doeth as a work *shown* and *given* to Him by

the Father; but the Father, because He has no other being than the Son, but dwells perfectly in the Son, "*He doeth the works.*" (Chap. xiv. 10.) It is impossible for the Father to reveal His being and working more perfectly or more visibly than in the only-begotten Son, the reflection of His being and working.

Ver. 37, 38. "*And the Father Himself, which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape. And ye have not His word abiding in you: for whom He hath sent, Him ye believe not.*"

As the Jews derived no benefit from the witness of John, because they would not permit the fire of repentance to be kindled within them; so neither did the witness of Jesus Christ's works avail them aught, because, satisfied with their own righteousness, they had no eyes for the holy Father *Himself*, who stood before them, full of grace, in the only-begotten Son. "The full soul loatheth an honeycomb" (Prov. xxvii. 7). They were unable to perceive the Father's "*shape and voice*" in the *works* which He had given the Son to do, because they were blind and deaf to the *word* of Scripture, to the *word* of the Old Testament mirror holding up before them the glory of God. The *shape* of the living God who had appeared to the fathers and to Moses (Num. xii. 8), and had in the law revealed the holiness of His being, and His *voice* from the lips of the holy Prophets—none of this was impressed in the hearts of these Jews: "*Ye have not His word abiding in you.*" In the written word abode for all Israelites God's *shape and voice*, but it did not dwell through the word in the *hearts* of the Jews. The word found no ground or place in their hearts in which it could abide (chap. viii. 37). Had they yielded their inner life and their whole heart to be fashioned and tuned according to God's shape and voice in His *written word*, then they would have found again this same shape and voice, and that full of grace and truth, in the incarnate word, in the Son and His work; for the Son's shape it was and the Son's voice in which the Father appeared and spoke, when from time to time, even under the old dispensation, He revealed Himself

to His people. But now their unbelief in the written word was shown and avenged in their unbelief in the incarnate word : “ *For whom He hath sent, Him ye believe not.*”

In these words the Lord's discourse has already entered upon the subject of the third step of the witness accorded to Him, viz., the Father's witness of Him through the *Holy Ghost*. But is then the third step higher than the second, as the second is higher than the first? Is the witness of *Scripture* a greater witness than the witness of the *works*? With thankful joy we answer: Yes, it is greater! For in the witness of *Scripture*, the power of both the other kinds of witness is united in one. Through the works of Christ is fulfilled the prophetic word, the sum total of which was found on the lips of the last of the prophets, John; that costly jewel of witness of which St. Peter says: “We have also a more *sure* word of prophecy;”—yes, we have this precious word more *sure* even than the prophets had it (Rom. xv. 8), for it is *confirmed* to us in Jesus Christ, in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen (2 Cor. i. 20). Even, then, for those who saw present before them the glory of the only-begotten Son, the witness of the written word was the real master-key to the knowledge of His name; for without this witness Philip would never have found the Saviour (chap. i. 46); and it was to this witness that the Apostles principally appealed when they proclaimed Jesus as the Christ. But how much more is the Father's witness in *Scripture* of the Son the greatest *for us*, who in the *Scriptures* have the apostolic as well as the prophetic word! Therefore the much enforced exhortation in the next verse applies doubly to us.

Ver. 39. “*Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.*”

The Jews were quite right in believing the Holy *Scriptures* to be the treasury of eternal life. But they deceived themselves in thinking that they *had* eternal life because it was contained *for them* in the *Scriptures*; for they knew not the *Scriptures*, neither the power of God, whose word dwelt not in them.

They had neither understood nor received *the witness of Scripture to life in the name of the Son of God*. “*Search the Scriptures!*” Jesus therefore says to these Jews who were so learned in the Scriptures, and who made it their chief glory to investigate them. In order in very truth to have in the Scriptures that which they *thought* they had there, it was necessary that they should first inquire into them with a desire for salvation (1 Pet. i. 11), that so they might find in them the salvation and life of which they bear witness, viz., Jesus Christ. Christ was the Life of all true Israelites; for their life in the land of promise according to God’s statutes and judgments (Deut. iv. 1) had for its main substantial hope the future salvation, the eternal rest in the kingdom of Immanuel. “But I will give you a marvellous explanation and gloss of the Holy Scriptures, which as yet ye do not know, so that ye may read them and not mistake their meaning; it is this: See to it with all diligence, that your eyes are clear and wide open, and so study in the Scriptures as to seek and find *Me* in them.—*Me!* He who reads them so as to find *Me* in them, he is the true master of Scripture, the dust is removed from his eyes, and he will certainly find therein also eternal life. But if ye do not find Me in them, ye truly have not yet really studied nor understood them, neither have ye eternal life; although ye may read them through a thousand times, and be ever turning over their leaves, yet it is all nought and in vain.” (Luther.)

“*Search the Scriptures!*” The holy apostles were from their hearts obedient to this command of their Lord; and the brightest example of an inquirer into Scripture is found in the very St. John himself who has written down this word, “*Search the Scriptures!*” as it stood deeply engraven in his own heart. We should not possess *the Revelation of St. John*, if the Holy Ghost had not found a John in whose faithfulness in searching the Scriptures was fulfilled the word, “He that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly.” There is hardly *one* verse in the Revelation which does not show the blessed

fruit of searching the Scriptures. Everywhere are the mysteries of the future history of the Church revealed to the view of the holy seer in visions, the form of which is one familiar to him from searching the Scriptures: Moses and the prophets live in him; from them he borrows the holy letters, in order to write down what he saw in the Spirit. But it is not only the Old Testament Scriptures which shine as having been diligently studied in the Revelation of St. John, but the written apostolic word of the New Testament also receives honour in it; it can be traced throughout with what diligence the last of the apostles has read the writings of his fellow-apostles, and how he sets his seal to their one uniform teaching in the last book of the New Testament. And this is the disciple whom Jesus loved, who also leaned on His breast. Thus does the bosom friend of the incarnate Word honour the *written word*!

It has often been made an objection to our Church, that she cannot prove out of the Scriptures the doctrine itself which she holds, of Scripture being the only queen of truth; for where (it is asked) is it written that the apostles were to deliver over to the Church in *writings* the eternal rule of all doctrine which is unto salvation? As one answer, amongst others, to this objection, we repeat with our Lord Jesus Christ, "*Search the Scriptures!*" The relation held by the Lord and His apostles towards the written word of the Old Testament (and that held by the holy John to the writings of his fellow-apostles), is a strong shield with which we may ward off all the poisonous arrows which the old fiend, the arch-enemy of the victorious "it is written," lets fly from the camp, whether of old or new adversaries against our Scripture-Church. May, then, the Lord's admonition, "*Search the Scriptures!*" every day and hour be ringing in our ears! Only, search them aright; for although a man may search, yet he will not find unless he search aright.

" Search for Jesus and His light,
Nought else will thee avail,"

applies also to our searching in the Scriptures.

Ver. 40. "*And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*"

They *would* not! Scripture *urged* them to come to Jesus, that they might believe and receive life from Him; but life through Jesus, the lowly Lamb of God, was what they *would* not have, because they would not acknowledge their own life to be death—in short, because they would not repent. He who does not in Scripture find his death as a sinner under the curse of the law, will never find there his life as a sinner under grace through the Gospel (ver. 46). Verses 31-39 says that they *can*—verses 40-47 says that they *will not*. And is not this a foul blot, to be able to do a good thing, and yet to refuse to do it?

Ver. 41, 42. "*I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.*"

It was with sorrow that the Lord had cried, "Ye will not come to Me!" Not on *His own* account did He thus complain, but on *theirs*. This bitter complaint did not arise from a desire for *honour from men*, but from *sorrow on men's account*, whose unbelief in Him was a proof of the godlessness of their minds. His glory is given to Him by the Father; He had no need of *men*, to be glorified by *them*; but if *the love of God*, which was God's fundamental command to Israel, had been planted through the Holy Ghost in the hearts of these Israelites, then would they, as "Israelites indeed," have confessed the Son of God, and thus have given Him the honour which the Father has given Him (ver. 23). The Jews' study of the Scriptures had brought them none of that experience of the divine love which faith imparts, nor of love to God in return; for as yet they had neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape (ver. 37): therefore it was that they remained so cold and devoid of love in presence of that personal embodiment of love which stood before them in Jesus.

Ver. 43. "*I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another should come in his own name, him ye will receive.*"

To receive one coming in his own name is the punishment for not receiving Him who came in God's name. "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. ii. 10, 11). But the same thing that proved the punishment of the Jews in their false prophets and false Messiahs, is seen over and over again through all ages down to the present day. If a man refuses to worship the true God in Christ, such an one is condemned to serve the blasphemous names of their own self-honouring, which are to be read on the foreheads of the different Antichrists who appear. A man is either enlightened by the Spirit from above, or darkened by the Spirit from beneath: he who despises the *dove* (chap. i. 32), falls a prey to the frogs (Rev. xvi. 13).

Ver. 44. "*How can ye believe, which receive honour from men, and not the honour that cometh from God only?*"

They who seek their own honour will receive him who comes to them in his own name, for the lying flattery of men pleases them more than the rebuke of divine truth. In this the Lord discloses to them the cause of their enmity against Jesus; it is *pride*, and withal, *Jewish pride*. They *could* not believe, because they were not *willing* that their vain pride should be broken. Their miserable flesh (that they were Abraham's seed, chap. viii. 33) was the idol for which they desired honour from men as miserable as themselves, and they neither knew nor sought honour from Him who alone is God, and who can alone give true glory—the God of Israel; otherwise they would have found this glory in the very Son of the one only God, and as Abraham's true children, like Zaccheus, would have become partakers of that glory through faith in His name. Oh, that all seeking after the honour of being found in Christ as a child of the true God, might drive wholly out of our perverse hearts all hunting after honour from men, who are nothing! Let every one who feels that he would like to believe, but *can* not, examine himself by these words of Christ's, which pierce even

to the joints and marrow: "*How can ye believe which receive honour one of another?*" He who is not willing at Jesus' feet to cast away everything in him that is highly esteemed before men and in public opinion, such an one is an abomination in the eyes of God and His saints; he *cannot* believe that God is gracious to him, because God's grace and favour is not more valuable to him than the favour of the world. The next verse shows what kind of honour and glory the Jews sought from lying men rather than from the living God.

Ver. 45. "*Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses in whom ye trust.*"

It was with *Moses*, then, that they adorned themselves; the honour that they sought was that of being considered as faithful disciples of Moses and zealous upholders of the law. Therefore they cared little for the woe which Christ pronounced over them, saying: "We are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto *Moses*, but as for *this fellow*, we know not from whence he is" (chap. ix. 28, 29). Now the despised Nazarene, whose origin they did not think it worth the trouble to know, and whose accusations they set at nought, was not to be the first to become their accuser. Their accuser existed already, it was *Moses*, in in whom they boasted themselves; the law of Moses witnessed against them with a twofold witness: for, first, they had not kept it; and then, they would not come to Christ, into whose redeeming arms the law, as a schoolmaster, was intended to drive them. The law seeks Christ's honour, it is a witness of God against sinners (Dent. xxxi. 26), and it is a witness which the Father bears of the Son, the Saviour of sinners.

"What the Lord says to the Jews is exactly as if I were to say to the Papists: It is not I, but the very Fathers whose authority ye allege in favour of your superstition, who will accuse you of impiety! Or as if we were to say to the Pope: It is not we who accuse and condemn thee, but Christ Himself, whose vicar thou callest thyself; and Peter, whose successor thou wilt have thyself; and Paul, whose sword thou pretendest to bear: they it is who will accuse thee" (Chemnitz).

Ver. 46, 47. "*For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*"

They did not *believe* that Moses in whom they placed their *hope*; they hoped, then, in an imaginary Moses, and not in the real one. No sinner *can* place his hope in the real Moses—"for that would be to rush upon his sword" (Brenz). If they had searched into the writings of Moses with an earnest desire for salvation, they would have placed their hope in *Christ*; for He is the Hope of Moses, the desired and promised Alpha and Omega in all his writings; He, of whom Moses "has nowhere not written" (Bengel), and who, in Deut. xviii. 15-18, is clearly promised as *The Prophet*. If *Scripture* had been inscribed with genuine characters in the memory of their hearts, the *words* of Christ would have rendered those characters bright and clear. "They did not believe Moses in his account of the creation and his witness of the fall; for had they earnestly received that as truth, they must at once, as sinful men, have earnestly sought the living God, as Enoch and Noah did. They did not believe him in the histories of the patriarchs and their faith; otherwise they would have walked in Abraham's steps. They did not believe in the holy, heart-searching severity of the law delivered by Moses; otherwise their pharisaical righteousness by works would have been annihilated. Finally, they did not believe him, when the whole of his priestly and sacrificial institution brought to their minds the continual remembrance of their sins, and, as a shadow, pointed to a future real fulfilment; for otherwise they would have already become through Moses what John the Baptist had further wished to make them—a people prepared and ready for the Lord, and, like Simeon, joyfully laying hold on His salvation" (Stier).

But it is the same now as formerly. Where Moses does not humble, Christ imparts no grace. The Mercy-seat covered the law, that witness against sinners laid in the ark of the covenant: now if a man blots out the clear characters of this accusing

witness, and blunts the point of the condemning law that it shall not kill him, how can the Mercy-seat be precious to *him* ? The Spirit quickens them only who have been killed by the letter of the law. May the Lord preserve to His Church the sound and saving doctrine of the *Law* and the *Gospel*, so that we may neither, on the one hand, confuse them together, nor again, on the other, separate what God has joined together !

In *our* case, the *words* also are *written* words. Preaching comes from the written word of God. Just as Christ and His apostles directed the hearers of their spoken words to the authentic Scriptures of the Old Testament (Acts xvii. 11), so does the faithful preacher direct his hearers to the authentic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, in order that they may be quite sure and certain that the word of Divine preaching put into men's mouths, is one and the same with the word which they have in writing (1 Thess. ii. 13). That Church must needs blossom and bear fruit, whose oral word is a stream flowing from the fountain-head of holy Scripture !

The Bread of Life.

CHAPTER VI.

I.—I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE (VETS. 1-50).

Lord Jesus, we seek Thee in the Scriptures ; open our eyes, that we may so see Thee and Thy glory in this fifth chapter of the gospel of Thy beloved disciple, as he himself saw it. Amen.

THE whole sum of St. John's gospel announcement is comprehended in these words of his at the commencement of his first epistle : "*The Life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal Life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.*" The disciple testifies and shows what he heard his Master testifying and showing. The eternal Life was manifested in the only-begotten Son of the Father, who became man : that is the real substance, the sweet kernel of all the precious words of the Lord Jesus which we have hitherto read in our gospel. For what else did Nicodemus (chap. iii.), what did the Samaritan woman (chap. iv.), what did the Jews (chap. v.) hear from His holy lips, but this one gospel : "*The Life was manifested—I am the Life—he who believeth in Me hath eternal life.*" In this *fourth* discourse, which we are now about to consider, we shall find again revealed the glory of that same Life manifested in the incarnate Word. Here, again, is that saying true, that we receive out of His fulness grace for grace. If we have received in our hearts the word of grace contained in the Saviour's former discourses, then the new

grace which from the mouth of truth and life is here presented to us will find us ready and fitted to receive it. That the life of the incarnate Son of God is *our life*, and the means whereby it becomes so ; that the Being who has for ever life in Himself, *gives life to the world*, and the means whereby He does so—this is what the Lord proclaims to us in this gracious discourse on the *bread of life* ; thus summing up the substance of His former threefold discourse, and unfolding its riches. The mystery of *atonement* through the sacrifice of Christ, which Nicodemus dimly perceived under the type of the lifted up serpent (chap. iii. 14, 15), is here plainly revealed to us ; plainly also is made known the mystery of the blessed *indwelling of Christ*, the Well of life, *in His believers*, to the experience of which the Samaritan woman was invited (ch. iv. 14) ; and plainly, too, is declared the mystery of the *resurrection to life*, which is to be revealed as the crowning work of all which the Father has given the Son to do (ch. v. 29).

This sixth chapter has two principal divisions, each of which is again subdivided into two sections. A historical introduction opens the first principal division: *perishable* food is presented by the wonder-working hand of Jesus as a sign of *the* food which endureth unto *everlasting life*. This food is then further extolled. Let him who hungers after this bread of eternal life come to Jesus ; Jesus *gives* it to him in giving Himself. "*I am the bread of life*," the true Bread from heaven. But how is that done ? How does Jesus become to us the food of eternal life ? He answers : "The *bread* that *I* will give is *My flesh*." The eating and drinking of His flesh and blood is the subject of the Lord's discourse in the second great division, which is then concluded historically by the account which the evangelist gives of the different impressions made by this discourse on the disciples. In our meditation for to-day, we shall keep to the first division.

Ver. 1-4. "*After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed*

Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh."

The sending forth of the twelve and their return comes between the fifth and sixth chapters (Luke ix. 2, 10). They had filled Galilee with their preaching, and now they had returned and told their Lord what great things they had done. They had abundantly *watered*, and so needed again to *draw*. Therefore the Lord leaves Tiberias with them, and goes across the sea to the mountainous coast on the other side, into the lonely neighbourhood of Bethsaida. But he could not long remain with them in quiet seclusion. A great multitude followed Him, and around the mountain upon which He had retired with the disciples, were soon gathered crowds of Jews who were on their way up to Jerusalem to the feast of the Passover. "And He received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing" (Luke ix. 11). At this juncture the Lord's love thought of preparing an evening meal for the hungry multitude. He earnestly desired to become the true *paschal* Food of Israel, their real paschal Lamb (ch. xix. 36): therefore He draws this paschal company to Himself through the sign of miraculously feeding them; a miracle which John relates as well as his fellow-evangelists, being led to do so by the sermon on the bread of life, which his mind connects with it. As we have already considered the *narrative* of this miracle in the ninth chapter of St. Luke,* with the exception of those circumstances in it which St. John alone records, we shall content ourselves here with a cursory perusal of it.

Ver. 5, 6. "*When Jesus then lifted up His eyes and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip: Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat? And this He said to prove him, for He Himself knew what He would do.*"

* In our former volume of the Bibel Stunden.

Philip was of a thoughtful and anxious disposition, not like Peter, impetuous and soon rushing to a believing conclusion (comp. all the passages which relate to him, ch. i. 43 ; xii. 21 ; xiv. 7-9); and it is for that reason that the Lord, seeking in love to train the minds of His disciples, addresses Himself to him in particular.

Ver. 7-15. *“Philip answered Him: Two hundred penny-worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto Him, There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes ; but what are they among so many ? And Jesus said: Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down ; and likewise of the fishes, as much as they would. When they were filled, He said unto His disciples : Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone.”*

There is something especially sad in their wishing just at this particular time to proclaim Jesus as their king. True, He is a King, the King of the Jews, the King of the whole world ; but His kingdom is an eternal kingdom ; loaves and fishes and all perishable food which He bestows are only *in addition* to the real gift of eternal life which He confers upon the sharers of His kingdom. But see how patiently He bears the stupidity of the multitude thus entirely absorbed in things of sense ! He upbraids them not, He merely *departs* from them. He pours

out His sorrowful heart in prayer alone with His Father (Matt. xiv. 23). May He not, perhaps, have prayed to His Father with filial earnestness: Draw them, Father, that they may come to me (ver. 44)? In these hours of prayer, spent alone on the mountain with His Father, He prepared Himself—He will pardon the human expression—for the sermon: “*I am the Bread of life.*” But His disciples were also to be prepared for hearing this sermon; and how they were prepared we shall now read:

Ver. 16-21. “*And when even was now come, His disciples went down unto the sea, and entered into a ship, and went over the sea towards Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship; and they were afraid. But He saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. Then they willingly received Him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.*”

What was it that caused the Lord to quit His place of prayer to go forth on the sea? It was the distress of His disciples. Yes; no doubt He could easily have laid His commands on the storm, from the mountain or from the shore, and could in a moment have brought the little vessel to the land. But He came to them, drawing nigh to the ship. *They saw Jesus walking on the sea*; it was in order that they might see *that* that He came, and where He comes His disciples are ever immediately “at the land.”

The disciples saw the glory of the Son of Man—and they were *afraid*. This was somewhat similar to what happened to them a year afterwards, when they were distressed by another night and by another storm, when the Risen One appeared in the midst of the terrified group; then also they were affrighted at the majesty of His appearance, and needed to hear the gentle address, “Why are ye troubled? *It is I myself*” (Luke xxiv.

39), before they were able to recognise in the Lord's glorified body *that same* body which, without form or comeliness, hung upon the cross.

Whilst Jesus is walking upon the sea, He lifts up, so to speak, the servant's garb beneath which He had, in the period of His humiliation, veiled His majesty, and there breaks forth a ray of that glory which belongs to the incarnate Word. And it is concerning *that* flesh in which the eternal Word dwells that the disciples afterwards hear Him speak, when he says that His flesh is meat indeed, and meat of eternal life.

"The occurrences which John here relates were calculated to make such an impression upon the disciples, that they would be able to receive in faith His discourse on eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and to look forward to a future understanding of it, although at the time a great part might appear unintelligible to them. That which did not appear as if it could be sufficient food to satisfy so many, He had made sufficient; and now when they knew Him to be far from them, and themselves to be far from the end of their voyage, He had miraculously approached them, and had miraculously brought them to the land whither they were going. He who had so miraculously satisfied the five thousand, might well demand their faith if He spoke to them of a meat which He should give them, which did not appear as if it could serve as food. Could not He who had turned distance into nearness, and who had there found Himself a way to approach them where flesh and blood can not go; could not He actually bring to pass what He said of His flesh and blood, that He should make it to His disciples meat and drink? When He came to His disciples, they were immediately at the end of their voyage; thus will He also bring them to their last haven when He comes to them; death itself shall not be able to hold them when He awakes them at the last day" (Hofmann.)

It is remarkable that, eight days after this discourse, the Transfiguration on the Mount took place (Luke ix. 28); so that

there are two bright revelations of the glory of the Son of Man closing in this marvellous sermon.

Ver. 22-25. "*The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto His disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples were gone away alone (howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks): when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither His disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus. And when they had found Him on the other side of the sea, they said unto Him, Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?*"

A great many of the five thousand had remained behind at the place where they had been miraculously fed, when the Lord departed from them. These were annoyed that the Prophet, whom they had thought to have made their king, should thus have sent them away (Matt. xiv. 23). As if they held His signs and wonders in grateful remembrance, they *sought* Him, first on one side of the sea, and then on the other; and, having found Him, they approached Him with astonishment, asking Him when and how He had crossed over to the other side of the lake without their seeing Him. But the Lord knows what is in their hearts (chap. ii. 25), and discloses to them what they perhaps would hardly have liked to plead guilty to.

Ver. 26. "*Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*"

If thus it was with them, how should the Lord have walked upon the sea before their eyes, or have now confided to them the way of His coming thither? Their mind was filled with the *loaves* in recollection of their meal the day before, and not with the *sign*. They had been *filled*—that was enough for them; they felt no hunger in their souls, and of *that* food whose sign they had eaten in the loaves, and of that true meat

which endureth unto everlasting life, they cared not to partake. So entirely unearthly were they. The miracle, indeed, was something in their eyes—that they had all eaten of a few loaves; but yet the main point with them was that they had been filled, and they attended not to what the sign signified—they heeded not the radiating glory of the Lord, who had made the loaves as if they were sunbeams. But—and how comforting this is!—they are not too earthly for the Lord Jesus “who is in heaven” to continue to discourse with them. His love knows how to draw out from the animal covering the immortal soul, and can hear the faintest, the most secret sigh which the burdened spirit breathes after redemption.

The missionary Henry Martyn, at Dinapore, used to gather around him every week a crowd of poor Hindoos. They came eagerly, but, alas, Martyn soon perceived that they were more concerned about the loaves which he was in the habit of distributing amongst them, than about the bread of life in the Gospel! He was ready to despair, and had almost resolved to give up his preaching. Then he remembered this 26th verse, and he said to himself, “If the Lord Jesus was not ashamed of preaching to such bread-seekers, who am I, that I should give them over in disgust?” The next time he preached on verse 27, and had the delight of being asked by two or three Hindoos, “What must we do to be saved?”

Ver. 27. “*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed.*”

They sought Jesus: well then, they ought to have sought and longed for, not the *perishable* food with which they had been filled yesterday, but another food, whose power to nourish imparts *that* life which shall endure after the “belly and meats” (1 Cor. vi. 13) shall have passed away. Just as the water which Jesus gives *springs up* into everlasting life, because it *is* the water of eternal life (chap. iv. 14), so the meat which He gives *endures* unto everlasting life, because it contains everlasting life.

Thou must *labour* for this meat of eternal life. Not as if thou couldst procure it for thyself by thine own means; it is, to be sure, a meat which is *given* thee: "*which the Son of Man shall give unto you;*" but yet thou must strive after it, if thou wouldest possess it. *Hungering* and *eating*, *coming* and *believing*, that belongs to the *labouring* by which thou must procure this food for thyself. The Son of Man *can* and *will* give this food, He alone, "*for Him hath God the Father sealed.*" The Son of Man bears as a seal impressed upon His holy life and works the witness of the Father, of the most High God: "This is *My* beloved Son!" And it is because of this seal, because of the true Godhead, the fulness of which dwells bodily in the Son of Man, and whose holy "credentials" are the works which the Father hath given Him, that He is able to give food of everlasting life (chap. v. 36). He gives what the Father has given Him to *have in Himself* (ver. 26). "None can give life but *God*. Thou mightest think: How canst Thou, O Christ, man that Thou art, be upon earth the fountain of life to men, and how canst Thou give the bread of life, unless Thou wert God? Yes, He is that too, and nowhere wilt thou find God except in Christ. God has shed forth all His gifts, His will and eternal life, on Christ, and has directed us to Him; it is there that we must find it all: It is, however, a Hebrew way of speaking, when it is said that our Lord God has on His finger a ring and a seal with which He seals the letters which He writes and sends forth. Christ, and no other, we are told, is that Seal; all other seals are therewith rejected and condemned. It is a strong saying, comprehending an infinity of meaning, that He who will fain live for ever must have this food which the Son gives, and must be found in the Son who stands forth to our view sealed; otherwise, if he has Him not, he will fail of eternal life, for here it is that the seal and witness is impressed. Look now what you have in this text; it runs clearly thus: The Father has affixed His seal and signet to the Son. With these words He deprives of all honour and merit those teachers who would nourish me unto eternal

life, and exhorts us to hold by Christ alone. Therefore go thy way, and see whether God the Father has sealed that which has been preached to thee for thy belief; if not, tear the seal away" (L.)

Ver. 28. "*Then said they unto Him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?*"

Why do they not rather ask what *He* means to do in order to give them this imperishable food? They rightly observed that it belonged to the *works of God* to labour for the food of eternal life, but they were in ignorance regarding the secret of *God's power* working in human weakness. They only knew of their own doing, and in surprise they inquired what *they* could do to work a work of *God*. Jesus, they thought, was requiring of them something unreasonable.

Ver. 29. "*Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.*"

They had asked after *works*: Jesus calls that through which the food of eternal life is laboured for, *a work*, viz., *faith* in His name. It is God who works in us the work which we must do, namely, that we *believe* on Him whom He hath sent to be our salvation and our life, and has sealed as His Christ (ver. 37, 44). Just the same as the Lord's declaration in these words, is Paul's and Silas's celebrated answer to the jailor's question: "What must I *do* to be saved?" when they replied: "*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xvi. 31; Compare 1 Thess. i. 3; and 2 Thess. i. 11). The Son of Man, then, whom God the Father has sealed, is *Himself* the Bread which endureth unto everlasting life, and he who by the power of God *believes* on Him, *labours* for this meat.

Vers. 30, 31. "*They said therefore unto Him, What sign shourest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from Heaven to eat.*"

The Jews are offended at its being faith in this Jesus, through which they should become able to procure the food of eternal life. They could not see His credentials for being *that*. They

bring down our Lord's "believing *in* Him" to a "believing *Him*," and understand thereby an acknowledgment suitable to a prophet like Moses. But He had in their eyes no claim to this acknowledgment. Although they had so lately rejoiced at finding in Him the promised "Prophet" (Deut. xviii. 18), and wanted to make Him a king, yet now they esteem Him of small account compared with Moses, who had in their view seals to show of quite a different character: for what was the one single meal of earthly bread to the forty years' nourishment of their fathers in the wilderness by the manna of heaven? By the food which endureth unto everlasting life, they therefore understood nothing better than a fleshly food which should last for ever, and should always be anew, an inexhaustible larder. "What dost *thou* do like that? What dost thou *WORK*, entitling thee to belief? Thou exhortest us to labour for a food which is better than earthly food; but first do thou thyself produce food of Heaven, give us bread from Heaven to eat, that we may see and believe Thee!" Thus do these gainsayers meet Him. But He patiently endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself (Heb. xii. 3; chap. v. 34); full of gentleness, and seeking their salvation rather than His own glory, He does not yet break off His discourse, but He adopts into His discourse the very text of Scripture which they had brought forward in order to charge Him with exalting of Himself. The manna must serve to place in a still brighter light the true bread from Heaven.

Ver. 32. "*Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from Heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from Heaven.*"

The Lord's king-like: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you,*" is the answer to the appeal which the Jews made to Scripture: "*As it is written.*" From His mouth is to be received the true interpretation of the Scriptures, for He it is of whom they testify. Those passages which speak of the manna in Ps. lxxviii. 24; and cv. 40 (comp. Ex. xvi. 15) are true and certain, being the word of God; but the Jews' ideas of the manna did not

spring from the Scriptures, but from their own imaginations. The Lord's words present a fourfold opposition to their mistaken but self-conceited view of the Scripture: not *Moses*, not *you*, not the *true* bread, not from *Heaven*. *Moses* is not the "*He*" of whom it is written, that He gave manna to Israel, but it is God, "my Father." But neither did God give the *true* bread in the manna, which was the perishable shadow (Heb. x. 1) of the imperishable food of heaven. For although not provided by earthly hands, yet the manna descended not from the true *Heaven* which is God's throne. Therefore in the manna which your fathers ate in the wilderness, nothing has been given *you*, which could feed you unto everlasting life. But now *the true bread from Heaven* is at hand, which my Father *gives* you,—gives *you*, for He gives it to be the life of the whole world.

Ver. 33. "*For the bread of God is He which cometh down from Heaven, and giveth life unto the world.*"

The manna is called in Scripture *Angels' food* (Psa. lxxviii. 25), because it was furnished through the ministration of angels, but the true manna is something more than the bread of angels, it is the *Bread of God*, not descending in the dew from the heaven of the clouds, but coming down from the brightness of God in Heaven; and not *maintaining* temporal life, but giving eternal life; appointed to be the medicine of life, not to one race, but to every race in every time, to the *world*. "He who tastes this bread seeks for no further sign, for bread gives the evidence of its goodness in its very taste" (Bengel). But the Jews had not so much as tasted this bread which the Father was now offering them in the Son which He had given to them. Their mind was fixed on earthly, not on heavenly food; they made good what the Lord had said of them in verse 26.

Ver. 34. "*Then said they unto Him, Lord, evermore give us this bread!*"

Then would they have taken pleasure in Him, and would have made Him their King. *That* would have been a King for this people, who would have been giving them the miraculous bread

always with which the 5000 had been filled the day before! In the mouth of these Jews it is a miserable request. But we will take up this request—like that of the Samaritan woman (chap. iv. 15)—upon praying lips, we will embody in it our hunger after life and salvation, and say, “Yea, Lord, evermore give us this bread!” He will gladly do it. He will gladly become our “daily bread.” How could He, in fact, withhold Himself from a soul who hungers for Him, when He stands with such eager longing of love before the door of our hearts, even when we do not yet ask for Him? Every time that these deaf hearers of His words of love and life interrupt Him, He yet begins again to speak, He reveals with a brighter light His glory as our Jesus, and draws nearer and nearer to their hearts. Where else wouldst thou find this diligence of love, this unwearied patience, this condescending forbearance, except with the Shepherd whose delight it is to seek those who are lost? It seems as if, at each interval, we heard anew His word, “Come unto Me and learn of Me, *for I am meek and lowly in heart.*” Yes, indeed, *His* love *will* not be provoked!

Ver. 35. “*And Jesus said unto them, I am the Bread of Life : he that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.*”

Their request, “Evermore give us this bread!” the Lord was ready to fulfil in truth, but in a sense which those who made the request did not understand. Oh, that they only knew the Gift of God, and who He is who said to them, “My Father giveth you the true Bread from Heaven!” “*I am the Bread of Life,*” He says. I am the *true* Bread which *cometh down from Heaven*, and, as being *the Bread of God, giveth life to the world* ; in short, I am *the Bread of Life* ; for *I have* life in Myself, and *I give* life to those who have in themselves no life. (Compare the “hidden manna,” the food of life, which even in the wilderness of this world is given to those who overcome, in Rev. ii. 17.) From this point onward, the Lord uses the first person ; He speaks of *I, My, Me*. More and more urgently does He

seek to lay hold on them, if perchance they would acknowledge Him and come to Him ; and if they would not do so, they should, at all events, be dumb in the judgment, and have no excuse. As yet, they had not *come to Jesus* ; they had as yet experienced no inward contact with Jesus. The will of their heart was far off from the Salvation and Life of the sin-lost world. Therefore He could not satisfy them. “He hath filled the hungry soul with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away.”

“He satisfieth the thirsty soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.” He who *comes to Him* hungering after eternal life *shall not continue to hunger*, for He will not leave him hungry, but will fully satisfy him ; he who has come to Him and *believes on Him*, who confesses Him with joy to be sealed by God as the Saviour of the world, and with heart-felt confidence looks to Him for a quenching of the thirst which he feels for life and blessedness, such an one shall find what he seeks, *he shall never thirst* (comp. chap. iv. 14). Blessed are they who hunger, for by coming to Him they shall *eat* ; blessed are they who thirst, for by believing on Him they shall *drink*,—eat and drink the Bread and the Water of life (ver. 53, etc). In Jesus has appeared the true Joseph, who puts an end to all His brethren’s hunger and thirst, by extending to them the true Bread and the true Water.

“These words should be engraven in the heart with golden characters, or rather (for that were better) with living characters, so that we may know where it is that we ought to leave our soul,—where we should betake ourselves when we are leaving this world, or when we go to bed, or when we rise in the morning, or whatever else we do ; that we may know this golden art, Here my soul abides with Christ, so that I can have no occasion to hunger or thirst. This Man will not lie to me.

These are indeed dear and precious words, which it is not enough for us merely to know, but we must turn them to account and say, Upon these words will I go to sleep at night and

get up in the morning; leaning upon them will I sleep, and wake, and work, and travel. For, though every thing were to go to ruin, and though father and mother, emperor and pope, monk and parson, princes and lords, all forsook me,—though even Moses could not then help me, and I had only Christ to come to, yet He will help me. For His words are sure, and He says, Hold fast by Me; come thou to Me, and thou shalt live. The meaning of these words is, that whoever can believe on that one Man, who is called Jesus Christ, shall be satisfied, and cannot suffer either hunger or thirst" (Luther).

Coming and believing: on that the Lord's discourse now immediately dwells. The bread of life is indeed there; but where are they who shall *eat* of it? His love, which is hungering and thirsting after our life, will fain teach us how this eating through faith is effective to us. To those who will not come to Him and believe on Him, He addresses Himself in these mournful words:

Ver. 36. "*But I said unto you, That ye also have seen Me, and believe not*"

As ye were when I told you what was in your hearts (v. 26), so are ye still! *Ye have seen Me*; the light of My presence has shone around you in words and in deeds, but yet ye have not recognised My glory; ye now see Me, and I *am Myself* the sign which ye were desiring to see (v. 30); but ye hunger not after the bread of life, and therefore ye believe not that I am the Bread of life. "But we *do* see Thy glory, blessed Lord, we *do* believe that Thou art the bread from heaven!"—some such voice as this might, doubtless, at this moment, have been heard rising in the hearts of the disciples, of a Peter and an Andrew, a James and a John, and the Lord noted it: He Himself refreshed His soul with those first fruits of the Church which His Father had given Him, who had come to Him. For the Bread of life shall not be come down from heaven in vain. What matters it that some, yea, that many, do not believe in it? "Shall their unbelief make the faith of God of none

effect?" (Rom. iii. 3.) This sermon, nevertheless, shall not on your account be of none effect and remain without fruit. If you will not, another will; if you do not believe, yet another does. There is still a little company there, of poor, saddened, alarmed consciences, who know not how to help themselves, and are willing to be taught and sustained by another, who hear the word and learn it—can never have too much of it, and are in real earnest about it; they know nothing of their own righteousness and goodness, and are only too glad that the Holy Ghost should work in them, and so direct them by His power as that they shall be drawn to Me." (Luther.)

Ver. 37. "*All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in nowise cast out.*"

All, "the whole," the entire multitude of those who were to come to Him and have life in Him, stands before the Lord's eyes as *one* blessed society, as one perfected *whole* given to Him by His Father. Comp. ch. xvii. 2: "As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that *He* should give eternal life to *as many* as Thou hast given Him;" literally: "That the whole of what Thou hast given Him, to them He should give eternal life." With every single individual, who having been given by the Father, attaches Himself to the Son, another gap is filled in the complete number of those who, from all eternity, have been sealed to salvation. It was the Saviour's exceeding consolation (and it is also that of His servants) in the midst of the disappointment which He experienced from so many in His labour of love, that still shall never be any wanting, either in the Father's *giving*, or in the *coming* of all whom the Father gives; and that the number of those blessed ones who have come to Christ, although small (the "little flock") compared to the great mass of wretched ones who have not come to Him, yet in itself is a *great multitude* (Rev. vii). Now ask thyself this question: Do I belong to this blessed number of chosen ones, whom the Father *has* given to the Son from all eternity, and whom He *gives* to Him now in the time of grace? If thou *comest* to Jesus

because thou art *drawn* to Him by the Father (v. 44), then thou mayest feel happy in the assurance that the Father has given thee to Him. Do not be searching into thy election in that eternal purpose of God to which no man can attain, but direct thy gaze towards the Lord Jesus Christ, as He is portrayed to thee in the word ; looking into Him thou lookest into God's fatherly heart and into His most secret counsel. The Son *has been* by the Father given *to all* (ch. i. 29 ; iii. 16) : that is clearly and strongly stated in Scripture ; therefore He will really fain give *all to Him*, and that as certainly as that He has given His beloved Son *for all*. But He only *gives* those to Him whom His holy love *can* give, namely, those who allow themselves to be *drawn* by Him and believe (comp. verses 64, 65). Dost thou believe, being convinced by the Divine word, that thou art a sinner, and that Christ is the Saviour of sinners for thee ?—then with joy and eternal comfort read thy name in the book of life, inscribed there with the blood of Jesus Christ, *in whom* God hath chosen us before the foundation of the world (Eph. i. 4).

Luther once complained to *Dr. Staupitz* how exceedingly hard he found the conflict respecting providence and predestination. *Staupitz* answered : “ *In the wounds of Christ is predestination understood and found*, but nowhere else. For it is written : *Hear Him !* The Father is too high ; therefore, He says : I will furnish a way whereby I may be reached, and that way is Jesus Christ ; believe ye in Him, and then in due time ye will surely find out who I am. For God is incomprehensible, and we cannot understand or conceive what He is, much less what His mind is, He will not be comprehended, and, in short, will not be laid hold of, except in Christ. Art thou minded to argue about predestination ?—begin with the wounds of Christ ; then forthwith all arguing on predestination will come to an end. Therefore attach thyself to the word in which God had revealed Himself, and abide by that ; for then thou wilt possess the right way to thy salvation and happiness, if

only thou believest that word. But when men follow their own thoughts and their own reason, they forget God ; then the Laudate ceases and the Blasphemate begins ; for in Jesus Christ are all treasures hid, but out of Him they are entirely locked up. Therefore fashion Christ well in thy heart, and then predestination is surely at work, and thou art already predestinated. For God before predestinated and ordained that His Son was to suffer, and that not for the righteous, but for the sake of sinners. He who believes that shall become God's dear child. Therefore, on this point we should think thus : God is true, and lies not nor deceives, *that* I am sure of ; He has bestowed upon me His only-begotten Son together with all His blessings ; He has given me holy baptism, the sacrament of the real body and blood of His dear Son, and all manner of gifts both temporal and eternal. While I thus think of the great and unspeakable benefits which God the heavenly Father, for Christ's sake, and from pure grace and mercy has bestowed upon me, without any merit, any good works, any worthiness of my own, as His *word* testifies, and while I keep to that, the doctrine of predestination to my view becomes comfortable and sweet, and remains firm and settled, especially because I know that God in His word and through His servants is Himself talking with me."

It was in the year 1507 that *Staupitz* poured these consoling words into *Luther's* heart. They were never effaced from it. Even in the exposition which *Luther* wrote of this chapter more than twenty years afterwards, it is easy to trace *Staupitz's* pupil.

"*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*" Not even *you*, who now despise me and sadden me by your unbelief ! He who comes, though only at last, shall find me ready ; I will never weary of loving you ; and the vilest, the most miserable man who comes to me, "creep he to Me e'er so lamely," even him I will not cast out. For this word have innumerable Christians already on bended knees given thanks to their Lord

and Saviour; they have pleaded it to Him when they have come, so late, alas! and so laden with guilt, and with so many unperformed vows—so void of heavenly goods—so full of earthly burdens—so destitute of all fervour of spirit—so feeble and lame of wing—bringing with them nothing, nothing but sin—nothing but this corrupt, cowering, backsliding heart! Thou hast said, O Lord, *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* It is true, I cannot understand how Thou canst love and receive such an one as I am, for I am only worthy of being bid away from Thy presence; but I throw myself upon Thy word—I come as only I can come; my Jesus receives sinners!

When thou goest to the Lord's Supper, then at that time clasp this saying especially to thy heart. It is a true confession-text. "When the Lord says, '*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,*' He intends to portray Himself to our view in the most condescending manner, in order that we might know what we should take Him for, viz., if only thou hast the grace to hear and believe God's word, and to receive this Man Jesus Christ, then, this is what is meant by being brought to Him, and being given by the Father to the Son. And know certainly that He will also be glad to have thee—He is willing to receive thee. Thou must not, then, fear, nor think that He is an angry Judge, who will be for standing with the club behind the door for judging and condemning thee, for He is the real Bishop of souls, a true Teacher and faithful Pastor, thy Saviour, thy Intercessor, yea, thy affectionate Brother and kind Friend. If only thou come to Him He will not thrust thee away nor do thee any harm, but He will fain keep thee, saying unto thee, Fear not; it shall not be My fault if thou do not abide with Me" (Luther).

But, no doubt, we must *come*. The Father *gives*, by drawing us and leading us to the Son; yet He will not drag us thither against our will, but He entreats us to *come*. But the time will come when He will place before the Son's face all who would not come, and with irresistible force give them over to His

judgment. Either to be given to the Son for life, or delivered over to Him for judgment; either to have come to Him not to be cast out, or to be presented before Him to hear the sentence, "Depart from me!"—one of the two we must certainly experience, for at one time or another *all* men shall honour the Son (chap. v. 23). But what pains our gracious Lord takes to confirm our resolution, that we come to Him with confidence and with all joy! He could not be indeed Jesus, He could not be the Christ whom God has sealed, if He could cast us out.

Vers. 38-40. "*For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*"

To find mighty heroes and saints upon earth, and have them to serve Him—such was not the end for which the Son of God came down from heaven; but such poor creatures as we are, lost sinners, has the Father given Him for Him to save; and for this has the Father sent Him. How, then, was the Son to cast out those who have been given Him by the Father and come to Him? That would only then be possible if the Son had a separate will from the Father. But it is not so; He is of one will with the Father—His meat it is to do the Father's will (chap. iv. 34, v. 30). Therefore we may venture, and indeed are bound to come to Him with confidence. We bring before Him this His work, in which He clearly reveals to us His Father's will, and we plead, "Lord Jesus, thou Son of God, we learn out of Thine own mouth Thy Father's will, that Thou shouldest lose none of all whom He hath given Thee; therefore we confidently and joyfully trust in thee, that Thou wilt in our own case perform this Thy Father's gracious will, that we shall be with Thee never to be lost, but be kept unto life eternal." We *were* lost, but then appeared "the kindness and love

of God," who so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that all who believe in Him *should not perish*, but have everlasting life. For they who believe on Him, these are they whom the Father has given the Son, that He should lose none of them, not even one. That thou mightest *believe*, the Father permits thee to *see* the Son; and if thou seest Him *aright*, as John saw His glory, and as all who hear His voice in the holy Gospel behold Him, then thou dost believe, and dost eat the bread of life which endureth, and thou with it, unto *everlasting life*.

This is God's good and gracious will. Death, the last enemy, will indeed assault thee; he will tear away thy body from thy soul to destroy thee, at least in half of thy being; but be of good heart: it is *not* God the Father's will that even the body, whose soul has eternal life, should be lost (chap. v. 24, 29). Thy body, also, has been given to the incarnate Son, and *nothing* of all which has been given to Him shall He lose, but shall *raise it up at the last day*; and observe, He expressly promises this to every one who is filled with His life: "*I will raise him up at the last day.*" As a defiance to the great Murderer, to him "that hath the power of death," and for the consolation of us tempted ones who tremble before the grave and corruption, because to our reason nothing seems more absurd than the resurrection of the flesh (on which account the apologists of the ancient Church so strenuously bear witness to it, and contend for it in almost all their writings against the heathen),—yes, for our strong consolation against the last enemy, the Lord repeats it over and over again (four times in this chapter) with the clear note of triumph, "*I will raise him up at the last day.*" This is His promise, who, as a conqueror, was to bring His own body forth out of the jaws of death, which He did in His joyful resurrection. The bread of life has become a poison to death. If we are fed with the bread which is the flesh of the Son of Man, we shall live for ever; even *our flesh* will rest in security, for it is impossible, by reason of Jesus'

flesh (ver. 54), that death should hold it. Here, where we at length perceive what is meant by "the meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (ver. 27), a glance is opened to us forward into that sacramental mystery to which the Lord's discourse prophetically mounts in the 51st verse. But first He silences the murmuring reason of the Jews, essaying if perchance they would submit that reason to Divine instruction.

Ver. 41, 42. *"The Jews then murmured at Him, because He said, I am the bread that came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the Son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He saith, I came down from Heaven?"*

Instead of allowing themselves to be brought by our Lord's discourse into a frame of mind fitting them to receive His heavenly Glory,—the Glory as of the only-begotten Son of the Father—they put down His discourse by referring to what, as they say, they "*know*." They "*know*" that Jesus is Joseph's own son, born of natural generation; therefore it is not possible that He should be come from heaven. We, however, will be taught, not of these Jews, but of God (ver. 45), whose Son our Lord Jesus Christ is,—"*God's and Mary's real Son.*"

Ver. 43, 44. *"Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day."*

Did not even a Philip once call Jesus the Son of Joseph (chap. i. 45)? Yet he came to Him as the promised Messiah, because He felt the Father's drawing to the Son, and surrendered himself to that drawing. Yes, this is true of all the disciples who came to the Saviour; a holy veil, according to God's will (Matt. i. 20), concealed from every earthly eye the wonderful birth of God's own Son of the blessed Virgin, and none of them was able at once to pierce it.

"*Murmur not!*" When thou dost not immediately understand God's discourse, do not, however, take offence at it, nor

lead others astray by thy unbelieving words, so that they also take offence thereat with thee ; but lay thy foot all the firmer on the *one* foundation which has been laid, the foundation of the word, searching and praying, and allowing God to reveal it to thee (Phil. iii. 15, 16). It was thus that St. Peter afterwards acted (ver. 68). The Lord does not draw away the veil of Divine mystery from before the eyes of these murmuring Jews, but anew points their attention to the fact that the main point, faith, is *God's* work in them, and repeats His word, "All that the Father *giveth* Me shall come to Me," more nearly describing the manner of this giving by terming it a *drawing*. "God's word *shows* me, God's Spirit *constrains* me," were the words in which a dear simple-hearted woman once described to me how she was brought to the Saviour and to His Church. This woman was *drawn* by the Father. *Draw* ; a beautiful expression this is, to denote the secret work of Divine love in men laden with guilt, sunk in earthly things, and estranged from heaven (Cant. i. 4 ; Jer. xxxi. 3 ; Hos. xi. 3, 4). Man is like a waggon sunk in the mire under a heavy load, and Divine love is the strong team which draws it *up* and draws it *forward*. Throughout the whole history of mankind, up to the appearing of Christ, from Adam to Simeon and the wise men from the East, this drawing goes on of the Father to the Son who was to come ; and throughout the whole history of mankind since Christ, from the apostles to whom John the Baptist pointed out the Lamb of God, up to the infant baptised to-day, and away to the last sinner who shall sigh after a Redeemer, this drawing of the Father to the Son whom He has sent, will continue. Love *sends*, and Love *draws*. *None* can come to Christ without this drawing of the Father. The Jews overpowered by their murmurings the gracious allurings which at this very time were working upon them in their *seeing* the Son (ver. 40), and therefore the drawing of the Love of God was for them in vain. "Just as the magnet does not attract everything, but only iron, so there must be in man a disposedness of heart, before God's drawing can

take hold of him" (Theophylakt). But what sort of disposedness of heart is necessary? That which is enjoined in the word, "Be *silent* to the Lord" (Psa. xxxvii. 7, margin). To note with a delicate ear, when the gentle and yet powerful drawing of God's love in our inmost soul is laying hold of us, and in the very same hour that we perceive it to follow it without delay (as St. Paul, Gal. i. 16, *went* as soon as ever he was *drawn*): this is what *we* have to do in the gracious work of our conversion. Yet why do I say Conversion alone? Not once, not the *first* time only that we come to Jesus craving salvation, does the Father draw us; but as often as we come again, every time that our heart comes in blessed contact with the present Saviour, in the hearing of the word, in the partaking of the Sacrament, in prayer,—we can only come as drawn by the Father, and as obedient to this paternal drawing. The believer's whole life is one continued experience of this saving drawing of the Father to the Son, even to the end, until the soul has reached her home with Christ, yes, until the body shall be drawn in, by the working of God's almighty power, into the likeness of the glorified body of the Son of God.

This glorious end which crowns all foregoing experience of salvation, the Lord holds up to our view here for the third time in the words, "*And I will raise him up at the last day.*" On this last day it will be made the most clearly manifest, that the saints owe their life to the Father's love, who drew them to the Son, and to the Son's grace, who did not cast them out, nor suffer them to be lost; but it will also be shown as clearly, that the condemned have, by their own act, brought themselves into the judgment of that everlasting fire which was not prepared for them, because they despised the love of the Father which in Christ was prepared for them too, and which leaves itself in no man's case without witness, and because through the *sin* of hardness of heart they have brought upon themselves, step by step, the *penalty* of hardness. Let us, therefore, be afraid of neglecting the drawing of the Father to the Son which we may feel!

To-day we can yet trace that He is drawing us ; to-morrow it may be more difficult to us, and the day after we may not be able to trace it at all, if to-day, to-day we do not come. Fearful it is when He withdraws His hand ! “ He that hath, to him shall be given. But a greater fulness of grace will never be imparted to him who has made light of the grace received before, which, by the assistance of that same grace, he would have been able not to make light of. Therefore, he who frustrates the workings of Divine grace through obstinate resistance is at last no longer drawn, but God *lets him go*. Thus Agrippa was once *drawn* (Acts xxvi. 28), but kicking against the pricks, he was *left*” (Calov). *Powerful* indeed (Acts ix. 5), but not *irresistible* like the expelling power of Divine *wrath*, is the drawing of Divine *love*—as Luther says after his way, “ This Divine drawing is not that of the executioner who drags a thief up the ladder and to the gallows, but it is a friendly alluring and a drawing to itself. as an engaging man draws people to himself.”

There remain, therefore, the drawing, the will to come, the coming—these three ; the drawing is the commencement, the coming is the end, and the will stands between. “ Who was ever drawn who wished it before hand ? And yet, none comes who wills not to come. That he may have the will to come he is drawn by Him, who carries on His wondrous works in men’s hearts, *not that they may believe against their will, but that from being unwilling, they may become willing.*” (Augustine.) And again the same writer says : “ Thou holdest a branch before the sheep, and by it thou drawest it ; nuts are held before the boy, and thus he is drawn. If those things draw, which promise a pleasure to the taste, (for true is the saying, that every one is drawn by that which pleases him,) how ought not Christ to draw, whom the Father holds before us as our life and happiness !’

During His whole abode of sorrow amongst a people who received Him not, the Lord Jesus found comfort in His assurance of this : that the Father who had sent Him to sinners

would never grow weary of also drawing sinners to Him. Just as in verse 37, He withstood the bitter thought : "I said, I have laboured *in vain*, and I have spent My strength for nought" (Isaiah xlix. 4), to which he was tempted by the Jews' unbelief, by the words of comfort : "All that the Father giveth Me, shall come to Me,"—so here, likewise, He strengthens Himself against these murmuring hearers of His words, by the joyful thought, that for all that, the Father will work in men's minds a hungering after the Bread of Life, and will not leave the poor and foolish ones undrawn. Accordingly, He lays hold of the words of Scripture, and says :

Ver. 45. "*It is written in the prophets, "And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."*"

The Lord takes this passage from the chief of the prophets, Isaiah, from that glorious chapter which in our Bible (Lutheran) has for its heading : "The Church's gift of grace from Christ her Bridegroom." It begins : "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear, break forth into singing and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child. For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord." It is the 54th chapter, in which the Prophet beholds the joyful harvest of the sowing in tears of chap. 53. The Lamb of God had now appeared to fulfil the 53d chapter ; and so God had also arisen to redeem His word : "Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great," and so bring to pass chapter 54, where it is written in verse 13 : "*All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children.*" God's *drawing* then is a *teaching* ; it is not an uncertain something consisting in an excitement of feelings, but it is the Divine voice clearly penetrating into the heart of man, which *teaches*, and which indeed imparts *great peace*, since in brief, it reveals these two things : Sin and Grace. *All* shall be *taught* of God ; but it is only he who *hears and learns* what the Father teaches, who as a sinner thirsting for salvation and grace, comes to the Son

who is full of salvation and grace. "Gladly to hear and learn," that is how we are to meet the Father's drawing to the Son. But *where* do we hear the Father? How are we to perceive the voice of God addressing us in our hearts?

Ver. 46. "*Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.*"

For us has He seen Him, and He reveals Him to us through His word. If any man hears and learns His word, in Him does God the Father through that word bring it about that he shall believe and be saved (compare chap. i. 18; iii. 11, 32). "Therefore do not wait for God to give thee an especial word from heaven, so that thou wilt understand by thine own reason, and climb up into heaven, and search what the will of God is. Thou wilt not see Him for all thy climbing, but thou must come down to Him who has seen Him, who is come from the Father, and who dwelt with Him; it is He, verily, that will tell it thee. Therefore, hear Him. And the Father, by His drawing and teaching, points thee also to Christ, whom He has sent that thou mayest hear Him. But if thou hearest Him not, thou shalt, in short, be lost. Therefore I entreat you to learn what this means, *that the Father draws*—viz., to hear the words of Christ and to learn of Him, and not to turn away from His lips. For God condemns gaping and inquisitive men, and those who take away from the word spoken, and will, forsooth, wait until our Lord God should give them the Spirit, and speak with them Himself from heaven. But if thou dost hear from the lips of Christ, then thou wilt be preserved and enlightened, then thou shalt also be taught, drawn, and brought to Christ. For first thou hearest the Father speaking to thee in the Son. Thou hearest the voice or the word, but thou art not yet drawn by it; for reason says: Christ is only a man, and His words but human words. But afterwards, when thou delightest to converse with the word, readest it, hearest it preached, and lovest it, then very soon thou wilt come to be able to say: God Himself has said it; verily, this is the word of God! Thus faith

comes as well. When thou canst thus put this and that together, and thou canst feel it in thy heart, then thou mayest reckon thyself amongst the scholars of the Lord Jesus Christ; thou wilt then gladly let Him be thy Master, and give thyself as His captive. Thus thou art saved. For so it runs: only no swerving nor going away from the word of His lips!" (Luther.)

Ver. 47. "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life.*"

As the Jews' quotation from Scripture (ver. 32) was followed by the Lord's majestic, *Verily, verily, I say unto you!* so here He accompanies the prophetic word, "*They shall be all taught of God,*" by an assurance of eternal life to all who should believe on Him. This, then, is the substance of that Divine teaching which was promised to Israel, that he who believes on the Son of God has eternal life (comp. 1 John v. 10). While the truthful lips of Jesus Christ are speaking this, that promise receives its glorious fulfilment; for he who hears his word as the word of God, and learns it, has been drawn to Him by the Father.

Our Lord's aim was that the Jews should accept His words respecting the bread of life as *the doctrine of God*, if perchance they thus might get to hunger after this heavenly, imperishable food. Therefore He now returns to this subject of His discourse, which the Jews had put out of view by their murmuring at the offensive words, "come down from heaven;" and thus He continues:

Ver. 48. "*I am that bread of life.*"

And in order that they might know this *life* in its power, which, as being bread, would fain be partaken of and become our life, He gives them back their own words, and says:

Ver. 49, 50. "*Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.*"

Perishable bread, such as ye desire from me, was what your fathers ate in the wilderness; they ate *mannu*, and are dead. Imperishable, incorruptible life manna imparted to none. But

the bread of which *I* am speaking possesses another virtue. *It comes from heaven*, from that place where the worm of corruption is not, *in order that a man may eat thereof, and not die*. For the bread which comes down from heaven operates with sinners in the same way as the fruit of the tree of life would have done with sinless man in paradise (Gen. iii. 22). Through the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, *death* entered into fallen humanity; through the eating of the heavenly tree of life, that is, Jesus Christ, *life* and immortality is restored to redeemed humanity: they are preserved from *eternal* death, from the never-dying worm of corruption. Let the corruptible part of our body, which was nourished by the bread from heaven, be laid in the grave—for the corruptible will not inherit incorruption (1 Cor. xv. 50); lost it never can be, for Christ will raise it up at the last day.

(II.) WHOSO EATETH MY FLESH AND DRINKETH MY BLOOD HATH
ETERNAL LIFE, VER. 51-71.

Lord Jesus, Thou dost stand before the door and knock; grant that we may hear Thy voice, and open the door; and do Thou enter in, that Thou mayest sup with us and we with Thee. Amen.

THE meat which endures unto everlasting life is Jesus Christ; He is Life, for from the beginning life was in Him; and He is life *for us*, for He became flesh and dwelt among us, and will fain be partaken of by us in *the bread* of life. *How* we are to partake of this bread is what He in His discourse has been hitherto teaching us. With the carnal hunger of the Jews He has contrasted spiritual hunger and thirst (ver. 35); and with the eating of the 5000 whom He had fed, and of the fathers who were fed with manna (vers. 29, 35, 40, 47), another eating, *the*

eating of faith, which comes to us through the drawing of the Father to the Son. And now with sweet accents of love He seeks to allure us to this eating of the bread of life, by attaching thereto the most precious promises that could be given. With His holy: Verily, verily! He offers Himself to be our nourishment, our meat, and our drink, vouchsafes us also a glance into the mystery of His person as God-man, in order that our faith may be able to find its way into the mystery of the partaking of His body and blood.

He is indeed no Christian man who would not rejoice in these promises spoken by our very Lord Himself, in a most especial manner at the *sacramental* participation of His body and blood. And we do well, when approaching the Holy Table, to ponder in our hearts the words: “*Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life.*” For *the same* flesh and *the same* blood of which the Lord here speaks as being the meat and drink of life, do we surely eat and drink with and under the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper.* Because His body and His blood is full of spirit and life, as being the body and blood of the Son of Man who came down from heaven and who was in heaven, therefore He can and He will give it to us *also* to eat and drink sacramentally. But His words in their primary and closest signification refer to an eating and a drinking designed to meet the hunger and thirst of the true hearers of His words by a present satisfaction with eternal life, viz., to that participation which takes place through *coming to Him and believing on*

* Our readers will bear in mind that Dr. Besser regards the Lord’s Supper from the Lutheran point of view; which considers that the body and blood of Christ are, after consecration, consubstantially present with the still continuing substance of the bread and wine; differing both from the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which pronounces the substance of the bread and wine to be, after consecration, gone, and its place taken by the substance our Lord’s body and blood; and from the teaching of the Reformed Church, that the body and blood of Christ are received in the Lord’s Supper, by the believing communicant only, not as substantially united with the bread and wine, but through faith.—*Trans.*

Him without visible signs and conveyances. Well He knew what He would do; that a year afterwards, on the night of His betrayal, He would take bread and wine, give it to the disciples, and say: "Take, eat, this is my body! Take, drink, this is my blood!" and the eye of His love looks forward to this institution of the Holy Sacrament of His body and blood, whilst He here commends His body as meat indeed, and His blood as drink indeed—"so that in the spirit of prophecy He here prepares the way for that participation which He would institute at the last" (P. Lyser). But if one of the disciples had prayed Him, saying: "Dear Master, give me Thy flesh to eat and Thy blood to drink, in order that I may have life!" would He have consoled him with the hope of *merely future* eating and drinking? Certainly not! As surely not, as that He can withhold from none, not even for a moment, the meat and the drink on *the partaking of which He makes life and happiness to depend*. As we *to-day* need our daily bread for our earthly life, so we need the daily bread of heaven for our eternal life. In the *Sacrament* of Christ's body given for us and His blood shed for us, we have a strong hold-fast and a comforting pledge of the spiritual partaking in His flesh and blood, His God-replenished humanity, which takes place through faith; and whilst we now cordially embrace these promises of His lips, let us pray to Him and say: "O Lord, grant that Thy holy body and Thy holy blood in the Holy Communion may, as often as we eat and drink it, produce in us the effect of a strong faith in Thee who art our life and our salvation." Yes, let us open to Him the door, when we hear His voice in the holy Gospel, that He may come in unto us, and in the Spirit sup with us and we in faith with Him: then shall we also with our mouth and teeth take of His supper in a worthy manner, to the strengthening of our faith.

And now let us enter into the meaning of our verse. We hear the Lord speaking of the partaking of His body and blood, the spiritual manner of doing which His word plainly shows us; but at the same time we find ourselves transported to that supper-table,

at which, a year after, the earnest desire of the Son of Man about to go away, gathered together His disciples, and to which His gracious word is *even now prophetically pointed*; or as Bengel strikingly expresses it: "Jesus purposely shaped His words in such a way, as at the time at which they were spoken and ever, they should properly treat of the spiritual fruition of Himself, but they should also afterwards, and as a just consequence, be applicable to the most sacred mystery of the supper, when this should be instituted." Therefore it cannot be doubted, that the holy John preserved this discourse in the casket of his teachable heart, as a *fulfilled* prophecy, *i.e.*, as a *Lord's Supper* sermon, and, as such, delivered it to the Church, together with the baptismal sermon in chap. iii.

Ver. 51. "*I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*"

Here again, combining together verse 48 and 50, the Lord represents *His own self* as being *the living bread*, the bread full of life, which, as the gift of God the Father, had come down from heaven. But then—and this is the further step in the revealing of the grace and truth contained in this discourse—He goes on to speak as being Himself the *giver* of the heavenly *gift*: "AND THE BREAD THAT I WILL GIVE IS MY FLESH, WHICH I WILL GIVE FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD." *The Son of Man*, He had said in verse 27, will give you the meat which endureth unto everlasting life. Now He describes this food which He, the Son of Man sealed by God the Father with the seal of Godhead, designs to bestow: "And truly (comp. 1 John i. 3) the bread which I will give is *my flesh*." By this Christ shows Himself to be the bread of life, in that He institutes and gives to eat as life-giving food, His *flesh*. The Word became flesh; and the incarnate Word, God's and Mary's Son, gives His flesh for our nourishment; for it is the *flesh* which—He says—"I will give *for the life of the world*." As elsewhere He says that He gives up His *life* (chap. x. 17; Matt. xx. 28),

Himself (chap. xvii. 19; comp. Gal. ii. 20; Eph. v. 2), so here He calls His *flesh* the gift which is given for the life of the world. (Col. i. 22: "You hath He reconciled *in the body of His flesh* through death." And Heb. x. 10.)

I *will* give, He says. This giving of His flesh was accomplished, when on the cross He cried, "*It is finished*," and when in the flesh which He had given for the life of the world, He entered into heaven, to appear in the presence of God for us. But yet, what He *designed* to give was virtually as if it had been a gift already made. "My Father *giveth* you the true bread from heaven," He says, in verse 32, and afterwards in verse 55, "My flesh *is* meat indeed, and my blood *is* drink indeed." Just as at the institution of the Supper, the Lord handed to His disciples for them to eat and drink, His body which He was *about* to give in death, and His blood which He was *about* to shed on the cross, as the body already *given* and the blood already *shed* (for, from the time that the eternal Word was conceived in the blessed body of the Virgin, His flesh and blood is really the flesh and blood of the Mediator, sacrificial flesh and sacrificial blood): so here, His flesh, which He designs and is really about to give for the life of the world, He presents to faith for her living bread. Whoever among His hearers *believed*, was able to eat this bread, and already *had* eternal life. But many of them believed not. They would not be "drawn" to learn that the flesh, the giving of which obtains life for the world, must be indeed the flesh of *another* than "of the Son of Joseph," and that the eating of the flesh of the Son of God who was come down from heaven, who, as the Son of man, dwelt amongst them, and had set Himself to be the true sacrificial Lamb, would fulfil the desire of all pious men who had eaten manna, and yet were dead, who had eaten the paschal lamb, and yet were praying for the coming of the Lamb of God who beareth the sin of the world. Instead of allowing themselves to be thus taught of God, fancying themselves "full," and with their earthly mind unbroken, they placed their poor reason in opposition to His great grace and truth.

Ver. 52. "*The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us His flesh to eat?*"

This man—by this scornful word they barred against themselves the entrance into life. That the Messiah should prepare a meal, a joyful meal, for all who hungered, that they might eat and be filled unto eternal life—that they might know from the Prophets (Isa. xxv. 6, lv. 1-3); but that this Jesus of Nazareth would give them *His flesh* to eat, that *His flesh* should be the living bread of God—at this they are offended. And yet, in truth, the Lord had unmistakably said, "The bread that I will give is *my flesh*;" not my doctrine, not the fruit of my work of redemption, of my death, or the like, but simply, *my flesh*. No debate would have helped to a meaning which would have met their views; the word had sounded in their ears too forcibly distinct for any such interpretation. "How can *this man* give us *his flesh* to eat?"—*this man*, yes, indeed, a Jesus such as *their* Jesus was, cannot do it. But can *thy* Jesus? Dost thou believe on the Word which became flesh, on the blessed Son of God, who has made the flesh which He took, and which He gave up for the life of the world, so instinct with the power of His eternal Godhead, that it is *Spirit* and *Life*? (ver. 63). If so, then, this Man can give thee His flesh to eat; and where the Jews murmured and strove amongst themselves, there wilt thou bow down with joy, and yet with trembling, and wilt worship.

This that He says ought to be engraven in large characters in men's hearts: *My flesh, mine, mine!* But people will not see the *My*. Heretical spirits cannot understand the word *My*. "But with this word *My*, He divides and separates Himself from all other flesh, by whatever name it may be called. For by *My flesh*, He means, I am God, and the Son of God; My flesh is God-pervaded, and is divine flesh. It is His flesh that does it alone. *To this God will have it fastened and bound.* God will not be sought and found, except in the Person who was born of Mary, and who has true flesh and blood, and has been crucified. For God we can only through faith take hold

of or find in the flesh and blood of Christ; *that* flesh and blood we must know to be no mere flesh and blood, but flesh and blood deified" (Luther). Luther adds, in illustration, the two similes of sugar-water, which, he says, "is no longer watery, but sugary;" and of iron "heated through by fire," which is no longer cold to the touch as iron, but hot as fire.

The Jews *stumble* at the flesh of the Son of Man, but it is the Lord's will that we should *cling* to it as we value our life and salvation.

Ver. 53. "*Then Jesus said unto them, Verity, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.*"

To their disputing *How?* the Lord answers only by what He has said before. If they would come to Him in faith, being drawn by the Father, that they might have life *in Him* (ver. 27), the living Son of the living Father, they would thus perceive what is meant by eating His flesh. Let us, then, never repeat this Judaical *How?* when God's mysteries are presented to us! Mainly the Lord answers for the *possibility* of eating His flesh, by declaring the *necessity* of doing so. This He does by the addition of a new clause, which is intended to place in brighter light the declaration in verse 51, that His flesh as *given up* to death (as having passed through death), is the bread of life, for He adds, "*and drink His blood.*" "The *life* of the flesh is in the *blood*; it is the blood that maketh *an atonement* for the soul" (Lev. xvii. 11). The life which the Father has given Him to have in Himself, moves in the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. i. 19), the Son of Man, in whom the fulness of the God-head dwells bodily; and when shed as an atonement for the sin of the world, this blood gives life to the world. He who will live, must eat the flesh of Jesus Christ, and drink His blood; otherwise he remains in death. *Our* flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; it must be another flesh and blood to do that—viz., *His*, who came down from heaven, and who is ascended into heaven. And ours must His flesh and blood be-

come, if we would have life in us. "Either to have eaten my flesh, and drunk my blood, or to have lost life, and never be saved! There it stands plain enough; we cannot explain it otherwise, than that there is no life out of His flesh and blood, but mere death, if we will neglect and despise that" (Luther).

The full possession which faith gives, is admirably expressed in this, that eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ is the end of "faith in Him" (ver. 47). It is not exactly correct to say, that *eating and drinking* is *just believing*. The union with Christ's flesh and blood which takes place in eating and drinking is rather the blessed consequences of faith. Faith eats and drinks Jesus Christ, and that continually; and therefore, the believer continually dwells in Christ, and Christ in him (ver. 56). Faith does not allow Christ to stay without, but receives Him (chap. i. 12), lays hold on Him, and in Him, on eternal life, puts Him on, and causes us to be found in Him (1 Tim. vi. 12; Rom. viii. 1; xiii. 14). To him who in faith keeps Christ's word, will Christ come and *make His abode with him*. Indeed, by faith we appropriate the *whole* of Christ, we enter into a real [not a figurative] union with His holy living flesh and blood, "for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones," as being through baptism already grafted into bodily communion with Christ. As Luther truly says: "Faith unites me more closely with Christ than a husband can be united with his wife;" and compare 1 Cor. vi. 16, 17. Our faith and Christ, on whom we believe, cannot remain separated in the same way, for example, as our thoughts of a friend cannot reach the friend himself, cannot get possession of him. Our thinking is like a dish, on which the image that we make of our friend lies, going no further; but our faith has hands which reach forth to Christ, and which so touch Him that He feels it (Luke viii. 45). Whilst He Himself in His word stretches out His hand towards us, and lays hold of our soul, so that it becomes alive, the soul thus laid hold of lays hold again on Christ, and this laying hold is faith. But no man can lay hold

on Christ in faith, and adhere to Him, without adhering to *His flesh*: His spirit and His life is not to be had out of His flesh. To confess Him who came *in the flesh*, is what the Spirit, which is of God, teaches us (1 John iv. 2).

In what way, then, He gives us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink, so let us eat and drink it to the honour of His name and to our own life. Does He give it to us in the Gospel?—then let us spiritually eat and drink it by means of faith. And this spiritual partaking—this eating and drinking—takes place in one and the same action. The flesh and blood of Christ are not here considered as sundered parts of His body, but are employed to set forth the human nature which He took.

If we are to explain how it is that we by faith appropriate to ourselves His saving *body* and *blood*, we say, that it is promised to us that we shall *eat* His flesh and shall *drink* His blood. If He gives it to us also under bread and wine in the sacrament, then we also eat and drink it literally. May He preserve us from the judgment of ever losing sight of the spiritual partaking under the literal eating and drinking; but may He also drive far from us all undervaluing of His sacramental grace and gift! Would that they who deny the true body and blood in the Lord's Supper might diligently search their hearts, and find out what at bottom it is that separates them from the truth conveyed in the words of Christ's dying bequest! I doubt not they will discover in themselves the sentiments of these disciples at Capernaum, who found this discourse of our Lord on the eating of His flesh and blood a *hard* saying, because they did not with true faith honour this Person, Jesus Christ, the true God and eternal life, nor understand His "*My*." He who makes no distinction between the flesh of the Son of Man and common flesh, will also not distinguish the Lord's body in the Supper from common bread; he who does not eat through faith (and, indeed, though on earth, without soaring up into heaven) the flesh of the Son of Man, who is God over all blessed for

evermore, will not discern either, nor worthily *eat* the Lord's body, when presented to him to be taken into his mouth.

The threat contained in our text does not, then, it is true, *immediately* apply to the case of those who refuse to eat the flesh and to drink the blood of Christ *in the Lord's Supper*; but their opposition to the Lord's dying words shows that they do not take Him to be the Man who can give us His flesh to eat, *as He will*. The grace of Jesus Christ advances on from the offering of His flesh and blood to us in the *word*, to the *sacramental* offering thereof to us, and our faith should be willing to be led on by Him from grace to grace: whom we spiritually eat, Him it should be our joy and delight to eat also corporeally. Woe to those who allow to themselves less than Christ is willing to give them! But yet, love believes and hopes (on account of the large compassion of the Divine love) that there are believing partakers of the flesh and blood of Christ and of His life, even amongst those who have not yet learned to eat and to drink the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper; those, to wit, who walk in the simplicity of their heart, who do not rightly understand the matter, and who err unwittingly, and also take no pleasure in inveighing against the holy sacrament, as according to Christ's institution it is held in our churches, and as it is clearly taught from the words of His bequest thereof; and of whom we may hope that, when they are rightly instructed in the doctrine, they will, through the guidance of the Holy Ghost, yield themselves, with us and our churches and schools, to the infallible truth of the Divine word.

We should here observe with gratitude and praise, how heartily the Saviour desires our life. He knows that His discourse will sift the crowd of His followers; but He knows also that to believers (and God grant it may be to *us*) His words will savour as words of eternal life. Therefore He continues the subject, and now ascribes the same blessed consequences to eating and drinking His flesh and blood as He had before ascribed to the partaking by faith of the living bread.

Ver. 54. "*Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*"

Jesus Christ is the *Resurrection and the Life*. He who with all earnestness receives within himself that humanity of His which was conceived and filled by the Spirit of eternal life, receives *eternal life* in himself, both in soul and body entire. My *whole man*, not only my soul, but my body also, belongs to the *I* which through faith eats and drinks; as, indeed, God is not only the God of our souls, but of our bodies also, for He is the *God of the living* (Luke xx. 38). If Christ, then, in His Supper give us His body literally to eat and drink, let us thank Him that He does so "as a certain pledge and assurance" of the grace of life which He here promises to His believers. "Blessed be God, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." In this lively hope let us beat down every apprehension which the prospect of the fearful night of death may raise within us, with the joyful question:

"Can a head its member leave?
Nor bring it where it goes?"

Ver. 55. "*For My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.*"

Even the old covenant had a saving meat and drink; but thereunder was hidden the mystery of *that* meat and *that* drink which are now revealed, and which have really appeared in the flesh and in the blood of Christ. Meat *indeed*, *true* meat, is His flesh; drink *indeed*, *true* drink, is His blood. The word of Christ does not point again to a type and shadow, but to substance and reality—to the "body" (Col. ii. 16, 17). He has really and truly instituted His body to be our meat, and His blood to be our drink; He gives it to us to partake of in truth. He stills our hunger after life with His flesh, our thirst after salvation with His blood, and really implants in our persons, in thee and in me, eternal life, that we may be transformed into Him (and yet preserve our personality still). To the believer,

Jesus Christ is not a Saviour who is *afar off*, but who is *near*—near with the whole gracious fulness of His God-incarnate life, so near that He enters into us as meat and drink, enduring unto everlasting life. Therefore, in the *eating and drinking* of the body and blood of Christ, we should not look for expressions not used in their strict propriety; they rather only *approximate* to the expression of the reality of our intimate union with Christ through faith.

Ver. 56. “*He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.*”

“This is an epilogue and conclusion, in which He repeats all that He has said; as at the end of a sermon one is accustomed to say: My dear friends, this is the point, the great matter is this; this is the sum. So also the Lord means: Rule your proceedings by this, let all else go that one might be disposed to allege, and keep to this alone, that he that eateth My body and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life.” (Luther.)

Ver. 57. “*As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.*”

See how great is the mystery of Christ’s union with His believers! Having become one with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, which we eat and drink, we are sharers in His life; and it is not possible that the living Son of God should lose what the living Father has *thus* given Him for His own, to be flesh of His flesh, to be His affianced bride. Just as it is impossible that Christ should be held by death, because He has the Ever-Living-One for His Father, and lives with Him in oneness of Being (ch. x. 30-38): so it is also impossible that death should become master of those who, in their mortal body, share the life of the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ (Gal. ii. 20). We lay our feeble hand on this almighty promise of our Lord, and we rest therein with assurance: We shall live *by Him*! We pray God the Holy Ghost that He would be pleased to keep us steadfast even to the end in our faith in the Gospel, in the heavenly manna which we eat; and in our last hour, when our tottering faith

longs for a firm staff to stay itself upon, then may the bread of blessing and the cup of blessing of the Holy Supper, seal to us that communion of the body and blood of our Lord and Saviour, which is the only ground of our life, and our sure consolation.

The Lord now returns to the *bread*. What He has been saying concerning the eating and drinking of His flesh and blood is an unfolding of His former words in verse 50, "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die." After again summing up His former expression : My flesh and My blood, in the single word : "*me*," i.e., the bodily and living person of Jesus Christ, He completes the cycle of the discourse with the words :

Ver. 58. "*This is the bread which came down from heaven ; not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead ; he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.*"

The bread that *came down from heaven* is Christ's flesh. The Word which became flesh has imparted to this flesh which He took in the womb of the blessed Virgin His *heavenly* attributes. Seven times in this discourse does the Lord repeat that it is not earthly meat, but meat *come down from heaven*, which gives to those who eat of it eternal life. But the carnal-minded, seven-fold deaf hearers of His word, understood nothing of their spirit and life, but still obstinately clung to the flesh of the Son of Joseph, "which, indeed, profiteth nothing" (ver. 63).

Ver. 59. "*These things said he in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.*"

Whilst listening to the Lord's discourse, we have been constrained to transport ourselves away from the synagogue at Capernaum to that room in which, on the following Passover, the Saviour ate the Passover-lamb with His disciples, and instituted *the sacrament of the Holy Supper* for His Church. When He said : "Take, eat, this is My body ; take, drink, this is My blood !" there could not but come back to the minds of the disciples the remembrance of this discourse which they had heard from the same lips at Capernaum. *Why* the Lord was

instituting the sacrament, *what* it was that He was therein presenting to them, must have been made clear to them, to their comfort, from the words of this discourse, which are like the letters of a transparency, clear and legible through the light of the Lord's parting words shining behind. Such a Saviour is what we needed, who condescends to our dull and backward souls, bringing present before us, to be taken into our very mouths, those heavenly gifts, the *spiritual* enjoyment of which is necessary to our salvation.

“ If we must believe—as Delitzsch says—on the ground of the clear, unequivocal words of Christ, that faith becomes, not merely figuratively, but really and essentially participant of His flesh and blood, how can we doubt that this takes place in the sacrament? For the very reason that the partaking of Christ's flesh and blood is the indispensable condition of our life and salvation, has the Lord instituted the sacrament ; for the very reason because no satisfying of our spiritual hunger and thirst, no receiving of life, no union with Him, the Source and Author of our salvation, is possible, except through the faithful partaking of His body and blood, while yet our faith at times is so feeble and backward, and at times here below, where we bear our treasure still in earthen vessels, has no sensible feeling of a firm foundation and bottom—therefore, in the sacrament He gives us an indubitable holdfast, and under the visible elements extends to us those heavenly gifts which are so indispensably necessary to salvation.”

The especial grace of the sacrament consists just in this, that the spiritual partaking of the flesh and blood of Christ is to those who with the mouth eat and drink herein sealed. The sacramental partaking is *that which seals*, the spiritual partaking is *the thing sealed*. Therefore also to faith alone, apart from the sacrament, is the incarnate Christ given to be meat and drink ; but in the sacrament we eat the body and blood of Christ after a *bodily manner*. All who eat and drink of the consecrated bread and wine, eat and drink with their mouth the

body and blood of Christ; but only those eat and drink to their life whose souls *have* already been fed with the flesh and blood of Jesus, and who, amid the bodily eating and drinking get at the same time fed therewith; as *Luther* says: "The poor body knows not what it is that he there eats and drinks, but the soul of believers knows it for it."

What the Lord adds in vindication of this discourse which sounded so "hard" to many of His disciples, applies to both ways of eating the living Bread, the spiritual eating through faith, and the literal eating in the Sacrament. He meets the contradiction of unbelief by displaying in bright lustre the majesty of His Person, by virtue of which His flesh and His blood is the true meat and drink of eternal life.

Ver. 60. "*Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this, said, This is an hard saying: who can hear it?*"

It is by being taught of God that we come to His Son. For reason must give way here,—this miracle it cannot grasp. When we observe how hard and unbearable the Lord's discourse on the eating and drinking of His flesh and blood is even now at the present time found to be by so very many who can yet bear *some* of God's word, and find it satisfactory to the good pleasure of their reason, then we should be comforted by the thought that our blessed Lord experienced the same *from many of His disciples*. It is a further sign that our teaching is like Christ's, when reason and the carnal mind take offence at it.

Ver. 61, 62. "*When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples murmured at it, He said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if you shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?*"

As in chap. iii. 12, 13, upon the Divine matter of regeneration of water and of the Spirit, which was there called an "earthly thing," so here, upon the other "earthly" thing, the Divine matter of the partaking of the flesh and blood of Christ, does the light fall of the glory of the Son of Man about to ascend up to heaven. It is to His *disciples* that the Lord here speaks.

Those disciples who were not going away, but who remained with Jesus, saw Him ascend up into Heaven ; and to them His words, at which they now murmured, became then free of offence, ay, and even precious.

The Fathers of our Church have placed the clear wholesome doctrine of the holy supper in the most intimate connection with the clear wholesome doctrine of the two natures in the Person of Christ. Therein they but faithfully follow the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who here holds up before His gainsayers His ascension into heaven, the ascension of the *Son of Man*. "For He who is able to make His flesh, contrary to the natural property of flesh, heavenly, can also bring it to pass that His flesh can become the lifegiving meat of men" (Chemnitz).

It is *His* flesh and blood of which we partake, which has carried His holy humanity, first through death and the grave, and afterwards through all heaven, even to the Throne of Majesty, and who reveals His Glory, with which ever since He fills all things (Eph. iv. 10), on earth in the word and sacrament, in heaven face to face. It is *the same power* by which the Son of God ascended up into heaven as the Son of *Man* before the eyes of the disciples *as they beheld* (Acts i. 9), by which He now is able to give His flesh to be meat indeed, and His blood to be drink indeed. It is the power of the *Spirit*, the Holy Spirit, by whom His flesh was begotten.

Ver. 63. "*It is the Spirit that quickeneth ; the flesh profiteth nothing ; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.*"

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Flesh, as it is produced by generation according to the will of the flesh, sinful flesh subsisting under the power of death, cannot ascend up into heaven, neither can it profit aught for eternal life and for the resurrection at the last day. It was of *this flesh, born of the flesh*, that these men of Capernaum were thinking. *Mere* flesh is of no profit ; such flesh, that is, as, *in the notion of the Jews*, was the flesh of which

Jesus was speaking. (Compare 2 Cor. v. 16.) "The Lord here speaks upon the impossible supposition of His flesh being *mere* flesh ; just in the same way as in verse 38 He speaks of His will." (Bengel.) But the Son of Man was not born of the will of the flesh, but of the *Spirit* (Matt. ii. 20). The Lord is *the Spirit* (2 Cor. iii. 17) ; the Spirit, the ever-living Spirit is the Power which "quickens" His Flesh, in which He suffered and was put to death (1 Pet. iii. 18). Manifest in the Flesh, Christ is justified and mightily revealed as God *in the Spirit*, by virtue of His resurrection (1 Tim. iii. 16 ; Rom. i. 3, 4).

"The words that I speak unto you, they are *spirit*, and they are *life*." The words of His mouth declare concerning His flesh, and they are *spirit*, and therefore also *life*. The flesh and blood of *Jesus Christ* is not bare, merely common flesh, which is born sinful and under the curse of death, but it is *spirit* and *life*. In Christ must be recognised, as Irenæus says, "the communion and oneness of flesh and spirit." *Without* the Spirit, the flesh is indeed *bare* flesh, and not living meat ; but *with* the Spirit which quickens, it is a meat of life, rich with grace. "Let the Spirit come to the flesh, and then it profiteth much" (Augustine). All who have been baptised into one body are made to drink into one Spirit, as often as they drink the blood of the Son of Man (1 Cor. xii. 13). Compare also what St. Paul teaches us in 1 Cor. xv. 44, etc., regarding the first and second Adam,—the earthly relating to the natural life, and the heavenly to the spiritual life.

From the connection of the whole discourse it is now plain wherefore it is that the Lord says, My *flesh*, not My *body*, as He did afterwards when He instituted the holy Supper. *Body* and *spirit* are no opposites, but *flesh* and *spirit* are ; and the Lord means to say, that *in Him* flesh and spirit are not contrary the one to the other, as an earthly and a heavenly thing would be ; but that His flesh and blood, His human nature, is full of spirit and life. By virtue of the flesh of Jesus Christ, the flesh also of His members shall live in glory (Acts ii. 26, 31) : being

fed with the flesh of the Son of God, who was dead and who is alive for evermore, we can in joyful hope confess, "I believe in the resurrection of the *flesh*."*

Zwingli regarded this 63d verse as the very "bulwark" of his erroneous doctrine with regard to the Lord's Supper. He continually repeats that Christ here says Himself that His flesh profits nothing. How? *His* flesh? "If Christ were speaking of *His* flesh (Bugenhagen replies), He would make Himself a liar, for a little while before He says, that His flesh is the Life of the world ;" and Luther calls it "one of the greatest of all blasphemies, that Zwingli and Ecolampadius should dare to say that Christ's flesh is of no profit, *just as if it were merely bare flesh, in which was contained no Godhead.*" "Therefore," he exhorts, "let us not give ear to them who say: the flesh profiteth nothing. Rather do thou reverse the statement and say, *God without flesh profiteth nothing.* I have no God, either in heaven or on earth, and I know even elsewhere of none, except in the flesh which lies in the womb of the Virgin Mary." Apart from the flesh of Jesus Christ, such is Luther's meaning, God is not to be *had* for us. There is a difference between God's presence and thy *laying hold* on Him. For that God *exists* is a different thing from His existing *for thee*. But there is He existing *for thee*, when He adds to His existence His word, and says, Here shalt thou find Me. Now if thou hast the word, then thou canst with certainty lay hold on Him and have Him, and thou canst say, "Here have I Thee, as Thou hast said."

If any one has the same thoughts respecting the flesh of the Son of Man as these men of Capernaum had, let him learn their source from the following words, and renounce them:

Ver. 64. "*But there are some of you that believe not. For*

* *Flesh.* Thus in the German, as well as in the Greek and Latin of the Apostles' Creed. In the English Book of Common Prayer, though in the Apostles' Creed it runs, "I believe in the resurrection of the *body*," in the offices of Public Baptism, it is *flesh*.—*Tr.*

Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him."

He knew from the beginning (chap. i. 24, 25), and yet He bestowed His tender, loving care on these non-believers amongst the disciples who followed Him, yes, and even on that one of the chosen twelve, who was on the way to become the betrayer of his Master. Whom He cannot deliver and save, of those the condemnation is made, by the labour of His rejected love, to be without excuse.

Ver. 65. "*And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto Him of My Father.*"

Compare verses 37 to 44. Even amongst the disciples there were some who were longing more eagerly for *that* bread, with which they had been fed the day before, than for the bread which endureth unto everlasting life, and was come down from heaven; and Judas would have liked nothing better than that Jesus should have really allowed Himself to be made a king by the Jews; that would, indeed, have been a Messiah after his own covetous heart, just suited to his carnal mind! As yet it had not been given by the *Father* to these disciples and to Judas to come to Jesus; and therefore, also, they never had yet come *aright*. "Not the *Father*, but their *belly* it was that had drawn them" (Brenz). And it was not given to them, because they had not prayed for it; and they had not prayed for it, because it had not yet become their desire and their joy to be the disciples of such a Saviour as gives His flesh for meat and His blood for drink. They were too carnally-minded to be able to attain to the *understanding* of this most holy mystery of the kingdom of heaven. They heard God *speak* in Christ, but they would not be "deceived" (Jer. xx. 7).

Ver. 66. "*From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.*"

Thus, the first great sifting of the disciples who, from chap. iv. 1, followed Jesus, was occasioned by the Lord's discourse

concerning the eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood. Unbelief in this one article of faith brought to pass a complete separation from Christ. For the Lord allowed those to go away from Him who found this discourse of His hard and unbearable. “Not for the *large number*, but for the *purity* of His disciples, was He concerned” (Bengel). Yes! rather *no* disciples at all, than no pure and perfect obedience of faith to His word! For when these went away,

Ver. 67. “*Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?*”

Will ye? He, the lowly Jesus, will, indeed, not *force* them to remain, as also the Father, who *drew* them, did not force them to come; but yet there lies in this question an inexpressible power, a power only to be known by experience—the power of a love which, whilst it leaves us free to go, yet holds us fast. When the Saviour is saddened by the unfaithfulness of back-sliding disciples, and we—for have we not by nature the same unbelieving heart?—are tempted to a like unfaithfulness, then may this question from the Lord’s sorrowful lips strike home to our conscience, “*Will ye also go away?*” It was Peter who, with the quickest sensibility, felt that power of love which at this moment was weaving its influence round the Twelve, alluring them to remain with Him instead of going away; and in the name of *all* his fellow-disciples—of this he felt no doubt—he answered with a precious confession:

Vers. 68, 69. “*Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

“The Christian Church does just what St. Peter here says, “*Where shall we go? What shall we teach or hear? I know nothing except Thee, O Lord; I know of no preaching besides; but Thou hast the words of life. This preaching rings and takes hold of one; it has marrow in its bones; it delivers from eternal death, from sins and from all sorrow*” (Luther). Hunger-

ing and thirsting for *eternal life*, they had come to Jesus, and He had not cast them out; *to whom*, then, should they go? They knew no other Saviour. They were, it is true, as yet but beginners in faith, and but children in understanding; but one thing they were quite sure of—Jesus, and none besides, can save us! Without Him they could no longer live; a life without Jesus would be to them barren and empty, dark and dead. Jesus brought into their life *eternal life*; therefore they would not, therefore they could not go away; they must remain, so precious to them was their soul's salvation. *Eternal life*—this notion, on which everything in our Lord's teaching turned, St. Peter has heard and learnt. That word of Christ had entered into his very heart, and now it gives back its echo in the form of exulting confession. Peter, and those who were included in his "we," were really labouring for the imperishable food enduring unto eternal life, which the Son of Man would give them; for they believed on Him whom God has sealed and sent into the world. "*We believe*, and believing Thy words, which are eternal life, we are *sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*" The posture of Peter's heart is directly the reverse both of that of the unbelieving Jews and the disciples who had gone back; whilst those were offended that "*this man*" should offer to give them his flesh to eat, Peter opens his mouth wide, that Christ, the Son of the living God, may fill it. He desires to eat and drink the flesh and blood of the Son of Man; and that which *Augustine* has so finely said, "Believe, and thou *hast* eaten," was in Peter's case realised. In this one gift he received everything, although it was not until afterwards, in the light of the resurrection and ascension, that he was able fully to understand the treasure which Christ deposited with him. Meanwhile, happy was it for him that he would not go away from Jesus; for thus it was not possible that Jesus should go away from him. Although a year later, at the Supper-table, he was dismayed and grieved at the announcement of the Lord's going away, yet through the known power of the Son of God,

who tramples over time and space, his heaviness was to be turned into joy.

There were two things which made a turning-point in Peter's life: a *question* of Jesus, and a *look* of Jesus; the question: "Will ye also go away?" whereupon Peter decided to *remain* through his confession; and the look, when "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter," upon which Peter wept bitterly, and determined to *return*. May neither the question nor the look ever be forgotten by us!

The Lord's joy in Peter and the disciples who remained with Him, was saddened by the thought of that one disciple who remained indeed, though his heart had gone away, and who, by that very change, was falling from human into *devilish* guilt.

Ver. 70, 71. "*Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve.*"

None of the disciples at that time knew what Judas was; he had not joined in Peter's confession, for *he* knew to whom he would rather go—to them who instead of eternal life would offer him thirty pieces of silver. The Lord's question is addressed to *all the twelve*: and, therefore, they should now, as they did a year afterwards, have smitten upon their breast, and said: "Lord, is it I?" Even Peter should have felt humbled. For was Satan's rage so fierce, and was he so sure of his prey amongst sinners, that he could even dare to creep among the little chosen company of the twelve, and nestle there?—then, what fear and anxiety should have arisen in *all* their minds! We have observed again and again, in the history of the Passion, how deeply those words of our Lord: One of you twelve! had entered into the heart of St. John. He felt the unexhausted sorrow which then was in the soul of Jesus for the lost child, for *his* lost brother. To seek that which was lost, was for Him who for that purpose came down from heaven, in itself a bitter and a self-denying labour; but to seek the lost *in vain*, for three whole

years to strive with Satan for this soul, which *would* not be won:—this was a work which wrung from the Saviour the bitterest expression of sorrow. Yet He did not withdraw Himself from him. He had *chosen* Judas. The entire, earnest fervour of His saving love He bestowed upon him, and endured that one of the twelve should perform the devil's service upon Him, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled (chap. xvii. 12; Ps. cix.) This is what we cannot understand. Incomprehensible to us is the love which *created* the angel, knowing that it would become a devil to that love; just as incomprehensible was the love which strove to *redeem* Judas, whilst it knew, nevertheless, that he would work upon it the devil's will, all the while, however, doing nothing but what was ordained in God's purposes of salvation, which, even in the very midst of his wickedness, he was still constrained to subserve;—"this man should betray Him," because he *would not* be saved by Him. May the Lord's grace make us all firm and watchful, that in the case of no one of us may be repeated what befel with one of the twelve! The devil desires to *have* us all, as many of us as are chosen by Jesus to be His disciples, this we know; Peter, he had, in fact, well nigh "devoured" (the passage in 1 Pet. v. 8, is the fruit of bitter experience). Would we, then, remain amongst Jesus's chosen ones, never to go away? then let us will it *earnestly* and *sincerely*. To be upon an understanding with the devil, consenting to wilful sin, and yet outwardly to attach ourself to Jesus, to bear even His discourse on the eating and drinking of His flesh and blood, ay, and to appear among the guests at the holy Supper—this is the awful course which Judas pursued! Well may the word: "One of you is a devil," frighten any man away from the Lord's Supper, if he has fitted and prepared himself to give to Jesus Judas' kiss.

When the Lord discoursed at Capernaum on the eating and drinking of His flesh and blood, He spoke, and then for the first time, of His betrayer; when He instituted the Sacrament of His body and blood on the night in which He was betrayed, He

uttered the lamentation: "One of you shall betray Me!" Mark well how closely connected is this prophetic discourse on the Lord's Supper, with its *institution*!

Here, with this separation of those disciples who were true disciples from those who were false, by means of this discourse of the bread of life, ends the first main division of our Gospel. John has held up to our view the glory which he had beheld of the only-begotten Son of the Father; what he had heard, he has made known to us: the *Word* became flesh, in order that by giving His flesh for a sacrifice and for meat, He might impart to men who have no life in themselves, the life which was in Him, and which had been manifested. He who is *Life* for Himself, is the *Bread* of Life for us. We also see confirmed that other passage giving the general substance of the Gospel, in chap. i. 11, 12: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not; but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." The disciples who go away realise what is described in the 11th verse, by joining the Jews; the truth of the 12th verse is sealed by the behaviour of Peter and the other disciples who, like him, remain.

Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles.

CHAPTER VII.

(I.) THE WORLD HATES JESUS, VER. 1-36.

Hated with Thee by the world, may we, O Lord, love Thee!
Amen.

THE new division of our Gospel, which, by the help of the Holy Ghost, we to-day begin to consider, follows upon the former one just as in the short summary of the Gospel in chap. i. 1-18, upon "In Him was *life*," follows: "And the life was the *light* of men." "I am the *life* of the world" is the central point in the former division; in the one which now follows it is: "I am the *light* of the world" (chap. viii. 12). "And the *light* shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not;—this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil; for every one that doeth evil, *hateth the light*." In these words we see the thread which runs through the whole division from chap. vii. to chap. x. But it is not wanting either in shining traces of the fulfilment of the other word, that "he that doeth truth cometh to the light." May *we*, shone upon as we are by the true light, be of the number of those who fulfil this word, and thereby also the longing desire of the Lord Jesus. The deadly *hatred of the world* towards Jesus came forth more and more decided every day that the light was shining in darkness; until at length the hour of darkness arrived, when power was

granted to the world to work out its hatred against the light (Luke xxii. 53). But until this hour, the world's hatred was powerless, for the "men of the world" are yet "men which are Thy hand, O Lord" (Ps. xvii. 14); nevertheless, we find the Saviour even now with the cup of sorrow which the Father had given Him, at His patient lips. Going about amongst those who sought to kill Him, and submitting to their revilings, shining with grace and truth, and offering to dispel the darkness of their hatred with the light of His love, He, truly, as much reveals His glory, a glory as of the true Lamb of God, as when He hung on the cross, and yielded Himself to the power of death. Let us bear this in mind whilst we are considering this chapter.

Ver. 1. "*After these things, Jesus walked in Galilee, for He would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill Him.*"

Comp. chap. iv. 3; v. 18. Between chapters vi. and vii. there is therefore an interval of perhaps half a year (from Easter to the Feast of Tabernacles), during which time Jesus walked as a prophet in *Galilee* again, not in Judea; and in the interval of time also between ver. 21 and 22 of the tenth chapter, it was in Galilee that He worked. Journeys from Galilee to Jerusalem would be for Him passion journeys. "He who had the power to lay prostrate all His enemies, was yet pleased to retire from their persecution for the sake even of His believers, with whom such power does not dwell, in order that they might not be ashamed to retire, when not to do so would be tempting God" (Augustine).

Ver. 2. "*Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand.*"

In the autumn, half a year after the Passover, the Jews kept their feast of *tabernacles* in remembrance of Israel's dwelling in tents during the time of their marching in the wilderness (Lev. xxiii. 42, &c). They dwelt in tents or huts, erected on the roofs and in the streets, and made of green boughs; they carried branches of palm and citron-trees in their hands; they gave joyful entertainments; and the immense number of the

sacrifices offered during the seven days that it lasted, testified to the glory of the feast. Every morning, at the time of the morning sacrifice, a golden pitcher was filled with water from the fountain of Siloah, and with a song of thanksgiving was poured out at the side of the altar in remembrance of the miraculous supply of water in the wilderness; but every evening, at the time of the evening sacrifice, a brilliant light blazed forth from golden candlesticks in the court of the temple, and which threw its illumination over the whole city, in remembrance of the fiery pillar in the wilderness. Oh, had the Jews but known who it was that in Jesus was in their midst, they would have conducted Him with songs of praise to their feast of tabernacles: for to whose honour was it that they filled those cups with water at the altar and lighted up that fire in the court? Whose honour, if not that of Him who is the true Well of life and the true Light, the Lord Christ, in whom the water-gushing rock and the fiery pillar of the wilderness appeared in all the fulness of truth? Now was fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence. For there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day-time for the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain" (Is. iv. 5, 6). But they knew Him not. Therefore He went up to Jerusalem to the feast, not openly, but in secret, not as the king of Israel, but as the poor Galilean.

Ver. 3-5. *"His brethren therefore said unto Him, Depart hence, and go into Judea, that Thy disciples also may see the works that Thou doest. For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If Thou doest these things, show Thyself to the world. For neither did His brethren believe in Him."*

That the Scripture might be fulfilled: "I am become a stranger unto My brethren, even an alien unto My mother's

children." It needed to be that even in the point of suffering that "a man's foes should be they of his own household," the Saviour should be the Forerunner of His followers.

His brethren *believed not in Him*. They were not souls hungering and thirsting after a Saviour, and therefore the light of Life, near as it shone to them, found in them no opening through which its light might penetrate. They desired, indeed, to rejoice in His light, as those did who honoured John the Baptist; they would have liked nothing better than to flout forth in the Messiah-splendour of their brother; and therefore they try to induce Him to exchange His retired walk in Galilee for public display in Jerusalem. What are *the works that thou doest* to do for the Galileans? Show them to them in *Judea*, to thy *disciples* who have been baptized, and who are there waiting for thee (chap. iii. 22). If thou wilt have an open stage (and that surely thou wilt!) then step at length out of this retirement; show thyself to the world! Truly, they speak very frankly to Him, and quite according to their world's policy. The heathen Cicero says: "All glorious actions desire to place themselves in the light of publicity." The sting of their words is intended to stir up a feeling of honour in the, in their estimation, too humble Jesus. But the Lord seeks not His own honour (ver. 18). The devil had before now desired from Him such an exhibition before the world as that after which *they* were now craving, when he ventured to tempt Him in the wilderness, and found *nothing* in Him, no susceptibility for thoughts of His own honour; with perfect, holy calmness, the Lord here also thrusts from Him the temptation: "Show thyself to the world."

Ver. 6. "*Then Jesus said unto them: My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready.*"

The time should come when Jesus was to celebrate His entrance into Jerusalem, openly and publicly, amidst shouts of Hosanna, from the people. That was *His time*, the time when the hatred of the world against Him, coming to its climax in consequence of this entrance, was to bring about that highest

revelation of His glory into which He entered through the suffering of death. This time was at the feast of tabernacles not yet come ; and the Son, who went step by step in obedience to His Father's Hand, could do nothing of Himself (chap. v. 19), could not offer Himself to the world's hatred before the Father should point out to Him the hour. *His* time was a *God's* time, but the time of His unbelieving *brethren* was a *world's* time, and that "is alway ready:" they would go to-day or to-morrow, secretly or openly, according to their worldly good-pleasure—what mattered it? *Their* time agreed not with *His* time. It is the peculiar glory of believers, that in all they do or forbear, God's time is also their time. Never may His time and our time be separated from one another! And never may the condemnation of the next words apply to us, with which the Lord here reproves these His brethren, by so wide a gulf separated from Him!

Ver. 7. "*The world cannot hate you: but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.*"

The world loves its own, not indeed with true love, but with just worldly love; disunited and full of hatred amongst themselves, the people of the world are yet one, and love one another *in opposition to Christ and Christians*. When it is a matter against Christ and His kingdom, then the kingdom of the Prince of this world, otherwise divided, is marvellously united. (Luke xi. 18.) The world *cannot* hate thee, if thou dost not hate the wickedness of the world, and first of all, its wickedness in thine own self; but it *must* hate thee, if thou art in Christ, a light which reproves their evil deeds. Because the Lord's testimony (chap. v. 42.) penetrated even into the innermost recesses of the heart, and tore away every mask from the enemies of God, from proud high minded sinners, *therefore* the world hated Him.

This saying: "*The world cannot hate you, but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil,*" these words, which search into the very bones and marrow, should be pondered over by all Christians, but doubly by preachers, when

it seems so sweet and smooth to them to be beloved and praised by many. Add to that the saying : "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you ;" and let us preachers, besides, read in our closets Ezek. xiii. 18—23.

" If I, Dr. Martin Luther, were minded to flatter and pay court to the Pope, I might hope to obtain a bishopric and great riches as sure as you ; but because I will not do so, therefore you are all my enemies. How can the world hate those from whom they receive all forbearance and tenderness ? So long as you say not the truth, and speak and do contrary to it, as the world likes, must it not be gracious to you ? You are all fine and grand together ; it is one rogue in company with another. Well, then, set to ; bear witness that the works of the world are evil, preach the truth with might and main, and then see how presumptuous you are ! That is what I do. I flatter nobody, I tell *Annas*, *Caiaphas*, and the other High Priests and Pharisees, that they are God's enemies, and that they act and live hypocritically, contrary to God's word and command, and I cannot let their life and ways please me. They don't like that, therefore they would fain kill me. The works which Christ calls evil are not only gross sins, such as disobedience to authority, stealing, unchastity ; but even their most holy actions He here condemns as being godless work. If I tell the Pope that he is a rascal, that he has squandered away the Church's goods with harlots and rascals, I do not offend him ; he can bear that I rebuke such gross vices and sins ; and princes also can bear it, if one thus rebukes them. But if I say, that their best life in popery is hypocrisy and sin, they get angry at *that* ; they go mad, they cannot bear that *that* should be rebuked as bad and evil which they hold as the best possible." Let us look at the martyr-ways of the church in former ages, of her who is hated by the world, and compare them with her present ways ; if we do that, we must needs feel anxious and alarmed ; for we are, in truth, hardly any longer worth persecuting : our worldly state is described to us in the words : "*The world cannot hate you.*" Kyrie Eleison !

Ver. 8. "*Go ye up unto this feast : I go not yet up unto this feast, for my time is not yet come.*"

With them and in their spirit Jesus would not go up to Jerusalem. Not attended by them and the other pilgrims, and expecting a solemn procession to conduct Him thither, in short, not "showing Himself to the world," was He going up to the Feast of Tabernacles. It was not *this* feast that was appointed to place openly before the eyes of Israel its King and High Priest; that was reserved for the next Passover feast; then was Jesus's *time full come*. But to *this* feast He went up *in secret*, regardless of the impatient reproaches of His brethren, and not disdaining to pass in Judea for a despised *Galilean*. The Evangelist himself thus explains the apparent contradiction (which has been already held up to ridicule by the heathen *Porphyrius*) between the words and the actions of Jesus, by adding,

Ver. 9, 10. "*When He had said these words unto them, He abode still in Galilee. But when His brethren were gone up, He also went up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.*"

It was a judgment upon the Jews that their King went up to Jerusalem, "as it were in secret" (*incognito*). On account of their unbelief He did it. "Because they *would* not know Him, they shall not *be able* to know Him" (Luthardt).

Ver. 11-13. "*Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, Where is He? And there was much murmuring among the people concerning Him ; for some said, He is a good man ; others said, Nay: but He deceiveth the people. Howbeit, no man spake openly of Him for fear of the Jews.*"

There was not one whose heart was taken up with the joy of the feast. All were inquiring and seeking for that one Man (to name Him was unnecessary) whose presence was desired, by some from a carnal longing to see miracles, by others from diabolical hatred, by here and there a Nicodemus and a Joseph from a longing after salvation. Let *us* seek Him every day with longing love; thus every day may become to us a feast

day, because we find *Him*. “Indeed, no feast is a feast without Jesus” (Bengel). But none dared to speak *openly* of Him as they really felt. Those who were looking for the Messiah in Him, merely said, “*He is a good man*,” for fear of the rulers; and those who were contemplating His death as being a blasphemer, merely said, “*He deceiveth the people*,” from fear of the multitude. Hence arose the *murmuring*.

Ver. 14. “*Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.*”

It was not until the voice of the people, from whom the cry, “He is a good man,” made itself more and more heard, became so loud as to convince the “*Jews*” that they could not this time bring their hatred against Him to effect, that the Saviour came forth from His concealment in “prudent caution,” as Brenz remarks. For “he does not appear daring here, but allows Himself to be considered as weak, as if He were afraid of them. Yet He is not so afraid as that, on account of their spite and intimidation, He puts off God’s work and command; but He keeps the word of God that He should preach the Gospel; He goes up and preaches. And though, indeed, He sets about it so unobtrusively, yet, verily, through the strength of God it turns out well!” (Luther). He went up into the temple and *taught*—*i.e.*, explained the *Scriptures*—as we see from the next verse. Even in the blessed way of “searching the *Scriptures*” (chap. v. 39) has Christ gone before us. Although He, who is in His Father’s bosom, unlike us who are from beneath, was Lord of the *Scriptures*, which are, indeed, but the written revelation of Himself, He yet, *for our sakes*, faithfully kept the holy command, “*Search ye out of the book of the Lord, and read*” (Isa. xxxiv. 16).

Ver. 15. “*And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned.*”

Powerfully had the Lord spoken, so that even the malignant Jews could not conceal their admiration; but they stifled the inward voice which bore witness to the lips of truth, for they

would not do the will of God, the revelation of which was endeavouring to thrust itself upon them. Therefore they quiet themselves by saying that Jesus is no scholar-like Rabbi, no learned Doctor. How should the teaching of this Galilean be the true explanation of Scripture? So the priests afterwards were "grieved" that the disciples of this Galilean should teach the people (Acts iv. 2).

About thirty or forty years ago, when the pure word of God in the mouth of its ordained ministers was scarce in our land, it happened now and then that unlearned men amongst Christians were enlightened through the Holy Ghost, and endowed with gifts enabling them to bear witness. Then many preachers, like these learned Jews, sought to repress the wonder which they felt in spite of themselves, by asking scornfully, "How should these men understand the Scriptures, which they plainly have never learnt (studied)?" And when the Lutheran Church in Prussia, beginning to wake up, and struggling for life, had her preachers taken from her, under the notion of her being thereby put to death, what was their surprise to see that the crushed "worm Jacob," after a worm's fashion, supplied out of its own self the members which had been torn away, and that while the Gospel's "ambassadors in bonds" were praying for their bereft congregations, the Holy Ghost did not leave them orphans, but anointed the lips of unlearned men to be witnesses! And that was a happy time of blessing to our Church. But even now the same thing takes place. Let us pray God that He would give us a quick ear and a susceptible heart for *His* voice, whether it proceeds from "Jewish" or "Galilean" lips, whether it is heard from the pulpit, or in the journeyman's workshop, if the voice be only *scriptural*, and therefore the voice of the true Shepherd.

Ver. 16. "*Jesus answered them and said, my doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent me.*"

The doctrine of Jesus Christ is not a human invention of some Galilean, as the Jews imagined, but divine, and therefore true

doctrine. Jesus' doctrine is not *His*, as the Jews would use the term. He had not studied it out, and thought it out after man's fashion. He had not mastered it by dint of man's endeavour, as if it had previously been a doctrine strange and unknown to Him ; but He has possessed it from eternity as being the Revealer of that same God from whose inspiration the Scriptures proceeded. The Son, as He can *do* nothing of Himself, so neither can He *teach* anything of Himself. But the words, "*But His that sent Me,*" express also what the substance of His doctrine is ; just as in chap. v. 24, *what* that faith *is* which lays hold on eternal life is expressed in the words, "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him *that sent Me.*" Jesus Christ's doctrine, to wit, is not *His* in the sense in which we may call Isaiah's divine prophecy of the Lamb of God *his* prophecy, or in the sense in which St. Paul calls the mystery which was entrusted to Him of the calling of the Gentiles *his* Gospel ; Christ is rather *Himself the Substance of His doctrine*, as being the only-begotten Son of the Father, sent for the salvation of the world. Yes, mark this distinction, the doctrine of all the prophets who went before and who followed Christ, has its end in Christ, to whom they point ; but Christ, as a Prophet, is *Himself the Doctrine*, His *Person* the one centre of that doctrine, "I am the Truth ;" so, as High Priest, He is Himself the Sacrifice, and as King, He is Himself the Head of His Body. That Christ's teaching is the teaching of God is the experience of every soul which gives itself up to God's drawing ; he who has not that experience, of his own accord chooses not to know it.

Ver. 17. "*If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*"

If the Jews had "*willed*" to do the will of God which was testified to them in the Law (ver. 19), they would have discovered that they could not do it, and as penitent souls hungering after grace would have known that *this doctrine*, the doctrine of salvation in Christ, is no *man's* doctrine, but that it is *of God*,

whose love has fulfilled the prophecies and longings of Israel, and who has made His only-begotten Son to be for sinners Wisdom and Righteousness, and Sanctification and Redemption (1 Cor. i. 30). There is, however, no one (Rom. i. 32), even in the heathen world, much less amongst Christians, who does not know *something* of the will of God. His holy, "Thou shalt !" and "Thou shalt not !" is indelibly engraven in the *conscience* of every man. Well then, be it thy *will* to do the will of God as far as thou knowest it, then shalt thou arrive at Christ, Him who is the End of the will of God. And when thou art arrived at Him, and feelest in thyself the working of His illuminating light, then go on in *willing to do* the will of God, as it will become ever clearer and more fully known to thee,—and then, amid the doing to which His grace is making thee mighty, thou shalt gloriously grow and increase in knowing that this doctrine is indeed of God, of that God whose holy will of love draws to the Son all who shall be saved, and cries aloud to them, "Hear ye Him !"

This saying, "*If any man will do His will,*" etc., is a precious treasure, full of comfort for all upright souls, terrible for all liars. *Knowledge* is a daughter of the *will*. The Lord will certainly lead to the knowledge of the truth all *willing* hearts which do not love darkness rather than light, even though they are hid in the midst of heathen darkness, and He will do that by ways which He Himself knows ; to all those, on the contrary, who make their want of knowledge an excuse for their disobedience to the Divine truth, He will answer at the last, "Ye *would* not !" All, in fact, depends upon *true-heartedness*. Be true-hearted with what thou hast received, and what thou hast not got will be given thee. "He that is of God heareth God's word" (chap. viii. 47; xviii. 37), and he that is of the truth heareth the voice of Him who Himself is Truth. As it is folly for a man to choose not to go into the water until he can swim, so is it also folly for a man to choose not to give himself up to Christ until he knows whether His doctrine be of God. And he who has known and experienced the truth of the Divine word in the ways of consci-

entiousness, has also senses exercised for distinguishing between the doctrine of God and that of men ; as Luther says on this verse, “Well, a Christian is soon able, even from a distance, to scent where God’s word is, or where man’s word is, and that one is speaking from one’s self ; he sees from afar that the spirits of heresy speak of themselves, out of their own head and mind. They cannot escape me, Dr. Luther ; I can soon discern and judge whether their matter is God’s word or man’s ; for I do the will of God who sent Christ ; I have heard the word of God alone, and I say, “Dear Lord Jesus, I desire to be Thy scholar, and I believe Thy word ; I will open my eyes, and to Thy word implicitly submit myself. From that time He makes of me a free gentleman, ay, and a subtle doctor and teacher, entirely occupied with the word of God, and able to perceive that the faith of the pope, of the Turks, of the Jews, and of the Sacramentarians is not right,—they must go down ; I cast them all under my feet ; and I am become a judge and a doctor who judges right.”

To all who are of upright heart, and who therefore find in Jesus what they seek, viz., righteousness and peace, so that *in Him* they become men after *God’s will* and pleasure, to all such is also given to know the glory of the Son whom the Father has sent, in that very particular at which the proud and hypocritical Pharisees were offended, viz., in His *humility* and *poverty*. To them their Teacher’s humility and lowliness is a holy seal of His *doctrine* that it is of God, and that He does not speak of Himself.

Ver. 18. “*He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory : but he that seeketh His glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.*”

Comp. chap. v. 41, etc. If it were possible to have redeemed sinners by any other course than that of the deepest shame and most bitter suffering, Jesus would have adopted that course, for from all passion for fanatical self-chosen martyrdom He was wholly free ; but because *the honour of Him that sent Him* inexorably required this path of dishonour and contempt, even to the shameful death of the cross, therefore the Saviour sought

obediently His Father's honour, and not a breath of *unrighteousness* ever sullied the pure mirror of His holy, God-devoted soul. Behold, He is *true*; His truthful course, as of a silent, innocent lamb, bears witness to the truth of His doctrine as the doctrine of the only-begotten Son whom the Father has sent, through whom and in whom the Father Himself speaks and teaches. "What flesh ever undertakes is always for its own honour; but what Christ undertakes has in view His Father's honour and His own humiliation. But mark well the end! Flesh begins with honour, and ends in contempt; but Christ begins with the cross and with shame, and ends in the highest honour and glory" (Brenz).

We have now been applying the saying directly to the Lord Jesus, and have so explained it, to which also the form of expression (that sent Him) leads us. In fact, humility with all others is but a part of the business: it were blasphemous pride for any one of us to say: "Because I seek not my own honour, but God's, *therefore*, what I say is pure, Divine truth!" For the truth of our teaching we refer not to ourselves, but to the word of God alone. Nevertheless, we cannot be Christ's members unless from the fulness of His humility and truthfulness we also ourselves share in this fundamental Christian virtue. Whilst their own honour is sought, either openly or in secret, by all erroneous and heretical teachers, faithful and true-hearted teachers seek in their own work the honour of God and of His kingdom in souls who are saved. If we examine the matter closely, we shall find, that when a teacher's own honour is the ruling principle, the teaching cannot remain unadulterated, for to the word of God there will be further added what the man *speaks of himself*. "The nearest heretic has his seat in the heart," Wottersdorf says.

This self-sacrificing humility of the obedient and righteous man was lost upon the Jews, in whom the hatred of the world towards Jesus made itself manifest. *They would not do the will of God*, therefore they felt no need of a Saviour such as Jesus

is, but *sought to kill Him*. This the Saviour speaks aloud to their consciences, adding His powerful preaching to the exhortation which the very feast of tabernacles was addressing to them, whilst it reminded them of the *law* (Deut. xxxi. 10, &c).

Ver. 19. "*Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?*"

Why? Because they had not the love of God in them, (ch. v. 42), because they *would* not do the will of God revealed in the law, and hated the man whose appearing preached to them the law's holiness and spirituality—that spirituality which condemned *flesh* universally. Comp. ch. v. 45-47. Thou must either *love* or *hate*, either by repentance kill *thyself*, or by wilfully sinning kill *Him*: one of the two thou must do; Jesus leaves none indifferent whom His preaching reaches. "*Why go ye about to kill me?*" Oh, painstricken question which the Saviour asks of these sinners! He seeks their life, and *they* seek to kill Him! When sin smiles upon us, and by its deceitfulness tries to harden us against the chastening of the Holy Spirit, against the Lord's watchful and warning voice, then may the painful cry sound in our ear: "*Why go ye about to kill me?*" The strength of sin is the killing of the Son of God: the knowledge of this gives birth to and nourishes a thorough hatred of sin. If a man on Golgotha does not come to repentance, for him there is no room for repentance.

Ver. 20. "*The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: Who goeth about to kill thee?*"

Only some of the people at Jerusalem (ver. 25) were acquainted with the murderous designs of the rulers) but it was not the rulers alone, it was the whole nation, rebellious from its God, that the Lord had accused, when He said, "*Why go ye about to kill me?*" This appeared to the unbelieving people, blind through their sin, as senseless as to unbelievers of the present day appears the *either—or*, expressed above, "*thou must either kill thyself or Jesus.*" Therefore they revile Him, and call Him *possessed*. They meant, that it was the devil who was

deluding Him with such imaginary objects of terror. The lowly Jesus, when reviled, reviled not again, but soberly and calmly recalls to the mind of the angry Jews that work—the only work wrought in Jerusalem by the Galilean Guest at the feast—at which they were offended, and which led them to persecute the Saviour, because they had just as little understood it as they now understand His words concerning their not doing the law, and their killing of the holy God (chap. v. 10, &c.).

Ver. 21-24. *“Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel. Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision: (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers :) and ye on the Sabbath-day circumcise a man. If a man on the Sabbath-day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at Me because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath-day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”*

The emphasis lies on the last words, and these shew us the connection of the whole. *“Judge righteous judgment!”* (comp. Deut. xvi. 18), the Lord says to the Jews who cried out upon Him as possessed with a devil, because He accused them of going about to kill Him. Well, the perverseness of their present way of judging they might learn from the perverseness of their judgment respecting that healing on the Sabbath-day; and by penetrating into the true meaning of the Lord's words they might learn to judge righteous judgment. Moses comprised in the law circumcision, which was first derived, not from Sinai, but from the fathers; the same Moses in the law hedged round the Sabbath, which had its origin in Paradise, with the command, “Thou shalt do no manner of work.” Now ye circumcise a man on the Sabbath-day, and by this salutary work ye do *not* break the law; for, truly, by means of circumcision the man is received into the covenant within which only he can become a partaker of the blessing of the Sabbath rest; how can ye then be angry with me, because on the Sabbath-day I have really brought home to a man “that salvation of which circumcision is a

sign" (Augustine). I have made the man *every whit* whole; in the mirror of his healed body I have showed him the true salvation (chap. v. 14), thus leading him on to the goal and end of the *whole* law; so that now he is able to keep the Sabbath in spirit and in truth. Therefore judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment, by acknowledging that I have made this man whole (chap. v. 11), in order that the *whole* law of Moses should not be broken. (Comp. the subordination of the *law* to the *promise*, in Gal. iii. 17.)

The Jews did the direct opposite to what the sick man at Bethesda did. They would not be made whole because they felt not their disease; they despised salvation through the Saviour; thereby, in the midst of their outward zeal for the Sabbath-day, they were breaking the whole law, and were seeking to kill Jesus. Had they acknowledged this, they would have judged righteous judgment, and would have striven to kill that wicked spirit of blind pride with which *they* were possessed.

Vers. 25-27. "*Then said some of them at Jerusalem, Is not this He, whom they seek to kill? But lo, He speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? Howbeit we know this man whence He is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence He is.*"

According to the appearance they judge. Jesus is too well known to them that they should take Him to be the Christ, of whom *no man would know whence He is*. Elias, risen again, so thought the Jews (Matt. xvii. 10), was suddenly to usher in the Messiah, so that no man should be able to say which way He had come. Remarkable "tradition!" Then even amongst God's people errors may gradually gain ground, notwithstanding the clear light of Scripture (which was so plainly preaching *the Son of David* to the Jews), so that at length everything gets obscured. "So they are good for nothing scholars; they have, to be sure, caught the sound of the prophet's clock (Micah v.), but they have not noted the stroke aright. He who does not *hear* well, *imagines* well. They heard that Christ was so to

come that none should know from whence He came; but they understood not aright, that coming from God He was to be born of a virgin, and in this way come secretly into the world, as Micah says" (Luther). *This* "not knowing" applied to Jesus exactly. For no man knew the eternal origin, "the goings forth from of old, from everlasting," of Mary's Son, born at Bethlehem (Micah v. 2), whose name is "Wonderful" (Isa. ix. 6). According to the flesh, "which profiteth nothing," they did know Jesus; but to penetrate into the Eternal Word which became flesh, into the glory of the life manifested in the flesh, into the spirit and life of *this* flesh—to this they *would* not be led by God; and why? Because they were unwilling and afraid to come to Christ *without their rulers*. Therefore they beat down the impression of the Christ which they had received from His words, with the objection forthwith of their supposed knowledge of Jesus.

Even in our days, this foolish "we know from whence He is," hinders the wise men of this world from coming to Christ. If a preacher were to come down from heaven to them, they might perhaps believe; but to recognise Christ in the humble body of His Church, in the poor wrapping of the word and sacraments, in the poor *Christians* who are all too common to them, too well known—"they seem outwardly the worst people." &c.—in short, to find *the Word in the flesh*: to this they cannot make up their minds. And yet true Christians,

"Who inwardly are sprung from God, whom God
Has mightily begotten by His word—
A spark of the vast flame, eterne, divine—
Nurs'd, suckled, by Jerusalem above,"—

true Christians say, in opposition to the children of this world, who regard in them merely the "image of the earthly," and who say, "We know from whence they are," may boldly take to themselves the word which their Lord spake:

Ver. 28, 29. "*Then cried Jesus in the temple as He taught, saying, Ye know both me, and ye know whence I am: and I am*

not come of myself, but He that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him: for I am from Him, and He hath sent me."

A cry of lament it is which Jesus here makes resound in the temple; but yet it was, in fact, simply *teaching*, the Evangelist says; for "He shall not *strive* nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets" (Matt. xii. 19). "It is not often that Jesus cried out aloud; therefore when He did, there was a mighty cause for it: comp. ver. 37; chap. xi. 43, xii. 44; Matt. xxvii. 50" (Bengel). The cause in the present case is the sorrow of His Jesus-heart at the blindness of the people whom He was appointed and earnestly desired to save from their sins: "*Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am!*"

Luther says, "It sounds as if mockery—Ye know whence I am! and how finely ye know it! For ye know not Him that sent Me; and how, then, can ye know Me, or know whence I come?" Now there is, indeed, a holy mockery which is heard from the mouth of God Himself (Ps. ii. 4; Isa. xxviii. 11); but here the Lord is not speaking "in His wrath," but in His tender compassion. As Luther also paraphrases it: "Ye know, alas, only too little about it; would to God ye did know! God have mercy upon you! Ye know it, if one is minded to tell you, yet ye *will* not learn. Therefore it is, I say, that the world quarrels with God; His word must be the devil's word, and their word must be God's word." So that it is as if He said: Ah! yes; ye know Me as Joseph's Son, and ye know from whence I am—from Nazareth! Therefore ye consider Me too mean to be your Christ; and yet My poor form would not offend you, if ye knew God and had His word abiding in you (chap. v. 38; Isa. liiii. 2, 3). *I am not come of myself*, not in Mine own *name* (chap. v. 43), but it is another that has sent Me, and He is true; and as truly as He is God, so truly am I Christ, for *I am from Him*. The Son *was* from the Father in eternity; in time He *was sent*. The true Father of the Son is His true Sender. But because the Jews did not know God as Him that He really is—though they might have known Him by a sincere

searching of the Scriptures—*therefore* they were not able either to know Jesus as Him that He really is, viz., as Christ, the Son of God; and conversely, because they knew not Christ, the Fulness and End of every revelation of God; therefore they knew neither the true God. “This is the sermon and this is the dispute that we have to do with—so to receive Christ, and so to depend upon Him, that we do not speak or act concerning God without having this Man before our eyes. Be ever mindful that I have preached this; let others speculate acutely concerning God, the Creator of heaven and earth, concerning the angels and other creatures; be it so, let them go on as they will, I care not; let them sing of our Lord Jesus Christ, let them dance and spring. But when we begin to speak of the principal article of our faith—that which makes Christians of us—all depends on this, that I lay hold on the Christ whom the Father has sent, and that I learn also to know the Father, His office, and His word; otherwise, if we lose sight of this, we are lost” (Luther).

Ver. 30. “*Then they sought to take Him: but no man laid hands on him, because His hour was not yet come.*”

In this the world had a sign that their hatred was not directed against a liar setting himself up for the Christ, but against the true God and His true Christ. They *wanted* to take Him, but no man *dared* to lay hands on Him. He who understands that in faith as Christ’s member, may sing with Justus Jonas:

“Whate’er man’s power or wit devise
 ’Gainst us, undaunted let us rise:
He sits upon the highest seat;
He all their counsels will defeat.
 Their wisest plan let them essay,
 Yet God will move another way:
 In His mighty hand all issues stand.”

Luther extols “the hour, the sole armour of Christ,” as being the guardian of Christians: “God has appointed a nice, easy hour for everything; and that hour has the whole world for its enemy—it must attack it. The devil shoots and throws

at the poor hand, but in vain: for all depends upon the hour: till the hour comes, and the hand has run its course, the devil and the world shall accomplish nought" (comp. Acts xxvi. 22).

Ver. 31. "*And many of the people believed on Him, and said, When Christ cometh, will He do more miracles than these which this man hath done?*"

We have already seen, in chap. ii. 23, the mild and kindly manner in which the Evangelist speaks of faith, however defective it may be, and though encompassed with much darkness. Comp. also chap. viii. 30. These "believers" consider it a glorious *sign* that Christ is able to hold the hands of His enemies tied, and in this they were right. But the rulers hasten to snatch from the people and from Jesus this sign of the Christ:

Ver. 32-34. "*And the Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning Him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him. Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto Him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.*"

The council-chamber of the Sanhedrim was in the so-called "stone-hall," in the buildings which surrounded the temple, and on feast days the rulers assembled in a room near the court of the women. *The Pharisees* might thus very soon *hear* of the impression which the Galilean Prophet had made on the people; and, on hearing it, they resolved to take from Him for ever the power of doing any further harm. The hour in which God would "draw back the bolt" and give power to the world's hatred, though not *yet* come, was *soon* to come; and this the Lord well knew. "*Yet a little while am I with you,*" He says, "*and then I go my way,*" and yet I go not against my will whither your hatred thrusts me, but with my full consent I go whither my Father's counsel leads me,—through sufferings to my glory, "*to Him that sent me.*" And when the little time of grace should be over, in which He was *with them* ready to be

found as Saviour by all the miserable, then should they *seek* Him, not as now, when they sent officers to take Him, but with anguish and sorrow, and should *not find* Him; for where He should then be, in Heaven, on the throne of His Father, thither they would not be able to come, because when He cried to them they would not come thither through Him and with Him, and because, by hardening of heart, they had lost the heavenly mind which alone can lay hold on the blessedness of heaven. The Saviour sees before Him the misery of Israel, which, in Him, has thrust away from them their only Deliverer, for whom the twelve tribes instantly hoped day and night (Acts xxvi. 7), and which now, given up to a reprobate mind, has fulfilled the prophecy: "They shall look upon the earth, and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish, and they shall be driven to darkness" (Isa. viii. 22). In the words: "*I go my way; ye shall seek me and shall not find me,*" the Lord impressively reminds the Jews of that bitter complaint which the daughter of Zion uttered, after having through drowsiness and laziness neglected to open the door to her knocking bridegroom: "He had withdrawn Himself, and was *gone*; *I sought Him, but I could not find Him*; I called Him, but He gave me no answer" (Cant. v. 6; comp. also Prov. i. 28-31; Amos viii. 11, 12; Micah iii. 4).

"*Yet a little while!*" Oh, that these words might arouse all men from their slumbers and frighten away their levity, when Jesus is present in the word, with the drawings of His grace! Now He seeks thee, and thou wilt not be found; yet a little while—and He will go away; then shalt thou seek Him and not find Him. That the sort of *seeking* which the Lord means is not true, penitent *seeking*, from which He never hides Himself, but that it is a woeful seeking wrung forth by the anguish of hell, from hearts incapable of repentance and faith, which desire indeed deliverance from the *punishment* of sin, but not from sin itself, is plainly taught us by a similar passage in chap. viii. 21: "I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall *die in your sins.*"

This is the fearful end of all who in blind hatred thrust Jesus from them.

"These are dreadful words, I do not like to read them. And whether now it is the best advice, that we do not imagine that the Gospel which we now have will remain for ever, come again and tell me in twenty years' time how you think. When the present excellent and pious preachers are dead, others will arise who will preach and act according to the devil's good pleasure. The word cannot abide long, men's unthankfulness is too great, contempt and weariness make it so that the word must hence, and God can look on no longer. When, then, the word is gone, then ye will be unable to let it be, ye will then fain be pious and be saved, hear God's grace and forgiveness of sin and heaven; but it will be in vain. This is the worst of it all, that when Christ is gone, I must seek all this and not find it. For if He is not there, reason only remains, and reason will not do the work; for she cannot act equal to Christ, Christ is too high.—But the world will not be helped, it believes it not; and I am tired of the business. The Jews also did the same. Christ, the Son of God, came Himself, and after Him, His apostles, and warned them; but they believed it not. In like manner, must Germany go its way, and abide the consequences. This will be the case with us; no other will be the issue: we are determined to experience it." (Luther.)

Ver. 35, 36. "*Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will He go, that we shall not find Him? will He go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? What manner of saying is this that He said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?*"

The Jews *will* not understand His discourse, and pretend to be surprised, all the while deriding Him: "As he is rejected by Israel, does he mean, we wonder, to go into foreign lands, amongst the heathen, and to become a Greek's Messiah?" But mocking is a Caiaphas' prophecy; the kingdom of God was, indeed, to be taken from them, and given to the Gentiles, who would bring forth the fruits thereof (Matt. xxi. 43).

(II.) IF ANY MAN THIRST, LET HIM COME UNTO ME AND DRINK !

VER. 37-53.

*We thirst, O Lord, and we come to Thee ; give us, we pray
Thee, living water ! Amen.*

The world hates Jesus. But Jesus would fain allure out of the world souls, to give them what the world cannot give, life and salvation. How tenderly He loves the people ! The little while which He was yet with them, should be made a time of the most pressing invitation to them to be converted ; and hatred, scorn, and mockery He was ready to receive patiently and in silence, if only His cry of love might penetrate even *one* soul. *one* sinner's thirsting heart !—Take note how these two things followed upon one another : “*The world hateth Jesus,*” and “*Jesus cried and said : If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink !*”

Ver. 37. “*In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink !*”

On the last day of the feast of tabernacles, the song of the great Hallelujah (Psalm cxiii—cxviii.) resounded in the fullest chorus, and when, for the last time, the water from the well of Siloah was poured out by the altar, none would easily refrain from joining in the song of praise : “God is my song, He also is become my salvation ! Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Isaiah xii. 3). In the midst of this magnificent festal rejoicing, Jesus now mingled His cry, uttered aloud : “*If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink !*” During the seven days of the feast and their Divine services, must there not have been some heart which became *athirst* for *that* water which is drawn out of the true well of salvation, and which satisfies those who drink of it with eternal life ? Could the water of Siloah have made souls longing and

athirst only for the shadow of life there in the wilderness, and not also for the substance itself of life in Christ? Must none have then felt with sorrow that inward void, which no earthly feast of tabernacles can ever fill? Yes, indeed! There were some such souls, thirsting for the true, eternal God, amongst those who sang the words of promise: "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation!" and it is to them that the Lord here cries, standing by the altar in the Temple, what before, at Jacob's well, He had whispered into the dead heart of the woman of Samaria: *If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."* It is the cry which resounds throughout the whole of Scripture, and which had already been laid upon the kindly lips of prophets, (Isaiah lv. 1);—Jehovah's invitation: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," Jesus here distinctly appropriates to Himself. In this cry the Lord Jesus delights to reveal His condescending readiness to save all souls needing salvation, from the time of His pronouncing those blessed who thirst, in Matthew v. 6, on to the word in Revelation xx. 17: "Let him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely!"

If any man thirst—the Lord does not force them to thirst. There is a time when in His anger the Lord will force a thirst which shall never be extinguished,—in Hell; but now His grace allures and invites, draws, and with gentle violence constrains hearts, if, perchance, they might be brought to thirst.

The water of life which quenches for ever the soul's thirst, flows forth from Christ, the true Fountain of salvation and life. But further. Already had the Samaritan woman heard the precious promise: "The water that I shall give him, *shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*" Those who believe in Christ, not only drink and are satisfied (chap. vi. 35), but, united in one life with Christ, and "filled with all the fulness of God," they themselves become springs of life and wells of salvation to the world. Those who are born of the Spirit cause again the "sound" of the Spirit to be heard (chap.

iii. 8). This is the glory of the church, the body of Jesus Christ : and this glory the Lord extols in the following words :

Ver. 38. "*He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*"

In the Song of Solomon the Bridegroom speaks thus to His bride: "A fountain of gardens art thou, a well of *living waters* and *streams* from Lebanon" (chap. iv. 15). It is not without reason that we are immediately reminded here of those passages of Scripture—as Joel iii. 18 ; Zech. xiv. 8 ; and Ezek. xlvii. &c., which under the figure of a stream of water flowing forth from Zion, from the temple, set forth the glory of the kingdom of Christ. The true temple of the New Testament is the Church of Jesus Christ, His *body* (chap. ii. 21). That which was shadowed forth in the typical temple by the water of Siloah, shall really have its full accomplishment in the true temple of God which is built up with the "living stones," which are believers. Thus does the stream of life flow forth from *Christ's* body ; he, then, who is incorporated into Christ, and belongs through faith to the Church, which is His bride, out of *his* body shall flow rivers of living water. This promise holds for every believer. If, therefore, there dwells in a place but *one* true Christian, that place has a living well—a precious possession, but yet, how little valued ! A well of the water which we drink to thirst again, is highly valued, and poisoners of wells are subject to severe punishment : according to that measure should the wells of living water springing up into everlasting life be estimated, and men should reflect, that at the moment when the last of such wells upon earth shall be dried up, the world itself will sink into ruin ; for it is on account of these wells that the world is still spared and preserved. "Weak they remain, and yet they guard the world,"—such is the secret efficacy of Christians. But the rivers of living water which flow from the Christian's belly are not intended as a blessing to the world alone ; rather it is just here that the blessing of the *communion of saints* has its mysterious origin, viz., that these holy streams flow from one

member to another, and the life of each member is refreshed and sustained by that *river* which flows from the *rivers* of all the members of the whole united body. What is the apostolic word itself (chap. xvii. 20) *through* which we believe; what are the confessions of the Church *with* which we believe; what her hymns, her prayers, her sermons, all the witnesses of her faith and her love in saving utterance and in holy life—what *but rivers of living water flowing from the body of the Church?* The Lord grant that they be blest to us, these streams, and to all who thirst! That our life in faith may be refreshed through that one river—and pour itself back therein again—which on the day of Pentecost took its rise from the throne of our exalted Head, and which found its fountain-chamber in the apostolic Church! And that the water of this river ever continue to increase like the water which Ezekiel saw, and heal the waters of that sea which is the world (Ezek. xlvii. 8)! John, himself flowing over with these *rivers of living water*, in all humility explains their import, describing them as *received*, as fruit of Jesus' glorification.

Ver. 39. "*But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive, for the Holy Ghost was not yet given* (in Greek and in Luther's translation, 'was not yet'), *because that Jesus was not yet glorified.*"

"The meaning is this, that the *rivers* are the *Holy Ghost*; that those who have the Gospel and have received the Holy Ghost, can comfort, instruct, teach, warn, ay, can be of use to the whole world, and help to destroy eternal death and to obtain eternal life" (Luther). It is true, that with and in the *Person of Jesus*, the Holy Ghost "was" already. He is, in fact, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and on the incarnate Word He had descended in a bodily form at His baptism, and was resting upon Him. The disciples believed in Jesus, and they believed through the Holy Ghost, whose sound they heard from Jesus' lips and in Jesus' works. They lived therefore in the Spirit's atmosphere, *streamed around* by the Spirit's flood, and

sheltered under the Spirit's wings. But the Spirit did not yet flow forth *from them*; He was shut up in the visible person of Jesus. Not until this Jesus had been crucified by the Jews, raised up again, and exalted by the right hand of God, and thus made Lord and Christ (Acts ii. 23, &c.), not until He, through His resurrection, had entered into His glory, and began to reveal Himself as glorified to His people: not till then was it that the Spirit came to dwell for ever on them and in them (chap. xiv. 17, 23), in order from them to flow forth into the world. Before this, the throne—so to speak—upon which the Holy Ghost sat, and from which He went forth, was the Person of Jesus alone; but after His resurrection and ascension into Heaven, believers became, together with Him, the throne of the Holy Ghost; the *apostolic Church*, Head and members together, is the throne and dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost. "It is expedient for *you* that I go away," the Lord says, "for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come *unto you*; but if I depart, I will send Him *unto you*." Since the Saviour gave His flesh, which is spirit and life, for the life of the world, and ascending up where He was before, carried human nature into His glory:—since that time the Holy Ghost can and will dwell *bodily* in redeemed sinners; for they, as being in Jesus' brotherhood, are acceptable to God the Father, so that for the sake of the Head in heaven, the words, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,*" which were heard at Jesus' baptism, when the Holy Ghost descended upon Him, told also in respect to His members upon earth, the whole body of Jesus Christ. Since Pentecost, since "the divine laying on of hands" (Luthardt), this has been going on. The Spirit of holiness has declared the risen Christ with power to be the Son of God, the Lord of His Church (Rom. i. 4). The congregation of believers has received the Spirit and life of their glorified Head, and rivers of living water flow forth from their body as from *His*.

A two-fold property lies in the being of the Church: like Abraham, she is *blessed*, and she is *a blessing* (Gen. xii. 2); she

is *blessed* as being the assembly of all who thirst, to whom Christ gives to drink in the word and sacrament of and unto eternal life; she is also a *blessing* as being the assembly of all who have been replenished in Christ, from whose body rivers of living water flow. She is at once both a *garden* and a *garden-well* (Cant. iv. 15, 17): a garden full of flowers and fruits, flourishing through the living waters of the Holy Ghost, which flow through it; and also a well and fountain-head of these waters, whose holy power of life changes the waste places of the earth into the pleasure-gardens of the kingdom of heaven. Thus she is both: she is a *communion of believers* in one Holy Ghost, the edified body of Christ, and she is also the *mother of faith* through the Holy Ghost working in her, mighty in the word and sacrament for the edifying of the body of Christ (comp. Eph. iv. 11-13). And we confess both in the words of our catechism: "The Holy Ghost *called me* through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; even as He *calls*, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies *all Christendom* upon earth, and in Jesus Christ preserves it in the one true faith." The Holy Ghost does both: He gathers *us*, and *through us*; He causes us to *drink* in believing, and to *flow forth* in confessing and witnessing. The Lord *glorifies* His Church, and imparts to her a holy *mission*. May we, as true members of His glorified body, be found in blessed receiving and in more blessed giving of His Spirit and life!

Ver. 40-44. "*Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him. And some of them would have taken Him; but no man laid hands on Him.*"

Here, as in every place where the sound of the Gospel is heard, those who are satisfied separate themselves from those

who thirst. Amongst those who thirsted there were some whose heart embraced the word of Jesus: "Unto me, unto me!" and these said: "This is the *Christ*," for what mere *prophet* would ever have invited *to himself* those who thirst? But those who felt no thirst for the living water, had an excellent argument at hand why this Jesus could not be the Christ; only that they were mistaken in their premises, and did not know the Son of David who was born in *Bethlehem*, because He came out of *Galilee*. Oh, what is the harm of having come out of *Galilee*, if only we are born in *Bethlehem*! What matters it, that the true Church wears the servant's coat of an earthly, human name, if underneath is hidden the glory of her divine origin!

Ver. 45, 46. "*Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought Him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.*"

Not only upon Peter, but also upon these officers who were to have seized Jesus and were not able to do it, did the words of eternal life which came from His mouth evidence their power. For He taught them *with power*, and not as the Scribes (Matt. vii. 29). *He revealed His glory*, that glory which even to our eyes presents itself in His word which abides for ever. "But He has so ordered the words, that they struck the hearts and pleased in the case of those who had need of them; it is comforting, kind, and loving words that we have here, words which refresh, comfort, and strengthen those who are suffering under *thirst*. But the Jews were full and drunk with their empty holiness, and had no desire for this drink" (Luther).

Ver. 47-49. "*Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.*"

Even here, then, do we see the Christian's calling, as St. Paul describes it in 1 Cor. i. 20, &c. Brenz, in the name of the officers, thus answers the Pharisees: "Allow us to ask you who are learned in the law, whether our faith should be derived from the faith of the rulers and Pharisees? Have the rulers died for

us? Or have the Pharisees borne our sins, and overcome hell and the devil for us?" When Israel's shepherds, these rulers, presented the exact counterpart of the likeness which Ezekiel drew of them in chap. xxxiv., then it behoved that the word also should be fulfilled: "I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them. For behold, I, even I will both search my sheep and seek them out." And whenever in God's flock the threatening of the idol-shepherds is fulfilled, then comes in afresh likewise the promised help of the true, good Shepherd. The Reformation is a glorious proof of this; what we, the children of the Reformation, have witnessed in these last troublous times, and are still witnessing, strengthens us in the belief that the Lord's arm over His Church is not shortened.

Ver. 50-52. "*Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.*"

"Not *many* noble are called," but yet *some* are. It fell like a thunder-clap upon these mighty men, that one of their own number had become a prey to Jesus, in order that they might have no excuse. But what an encouragement to the poor ill-used officers it must have been, when suddenly in the midst of the rulers and Pharisees a mouth was opened for Jesus! It was the man who had heard Jesus by night, and had *known what He doeth*, viz., that He saves lost sinners (chap. iii.). He now confesses the despised Galilean, and is not ashamed to be classed with this poor mob, the "cursed" people. True it is only very timidly that Nicodemus ventures into the light; but the enmity of the darkness which forthwith encounters him shows that in the very bottom of his heart he had broken with her. The Pharisees, who boasted of their knowledge of the law, acted towards Jesus as if *they* knew nothing about the law (Deut. i. 16, 17); but they shrank from examining one who spoke like

no other man, and in the self-chosen blindness of their cowardly hatred they would not see the Light, whose rising in *Galilee* had been before announced in Scripture (Isa. ix. 1, 2). "*Search!*" Thus did they understand by "searching the Scriptures." They hardened their hearts against the truth which—even from the lips of the officers and Nicodemus—was suing for their souls, and step by step were given over to the judgment of unbelief.

Ver. 53. "*And every man went unto his own house.*" Chap. viii. 1. "*Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.*"

"Much then as they before had blustered, they dared do nothing to Him; they became still and silent. He goes up meek and silent, and returns home with glory or power; they go up with triumph, and come down weak" (Luther).

Jesus and the Adulteress.

CHAPTER VIII. 2-11.

*O Jesus, Thou Refuge of sinners, receive us, we beseech Thee,
under the shadow of Thy wings ! Amen.*

THEM who thirst had the Saviour been inviting to come to Himself, as to Israel's true Fountain of Salvation. The Pharisees did not thirst, and therefore they would not come to Him that they might have life. They were satisfied with the carnal and perishable rejoicings of their feast of tabernacles; Moses they believed not, for he causes sinners to thirst, in order that Christ may quiet the anguish of their heart with His Gospel. This Pharisaical mind comes out prominently in the events which are recorded as having taken place on the day after the Feast of Tabernacles. But the glory of the Lord also is here manifest, as much in opposition to the accusers as to the accused.

In most of the old manuscripts this most comfortable narrative is altogether omitted, whilst in some it is inserted after Luke xxi. There is some probability in the notion that it was received by verbal tradition from the Apostles, and was inserted in the Holy Scriptures as a later edition; if such be the case, whoever assigned it a place in our Gospel in preference to the other three, must have had a delicate discernment; for in it our Lord's glory is brightly revealed, the glory of One who came into the world not to condemn but to save, the glory which shines forth again in the discourses contained in the viii. chap., which immediately

follow upon this narrative. ("Ye judge after the flesh, I judge no man; and yet, if I judge, my judgment is true.")

May the Spirit of Truth enlighten us to see that glory of His, and to be refreshed thereby!

On the last day of the feast, the Lord had retired to the mount of Olives for private prayer,—to that same place where, when His hour was come, He was to be taken prisoner by those who now as yet did not dare to lay hands on Him. It was His wont, even now, to consecrate this place with prayers and tears (Comp. Luke xxi. 37). Strengthened thereby for His Saviour's office of leading thirsting souls to the well of salvation, He then hastened to work His gracious works while it was day (Chap. ix. 4).

Ver. 2, "*And early in the morning, He came again into the Temple, and all the people came unto Him; and He sat down, and taught them.*"

All the people came unto Him,—in spite of the declared enmity of the rulers towards Him. The discourse which had made the last day of the Feast really the greatest, now gathered to this "Preacher of sweet doctrine" all those who had been unable to find satisfaction in the seven days feast in the temple.

And Jesus sat down and taught them, as no man had ever yet taught them. This goaded the hatred of the Pharisees and Scribes (the latter are here expressly mentioned in opposition to the "Galilean," who was no "scribe" chap. vii. 15), to a fresh outbreak. They now wanted to show the people what a deceiving teacher Jesus was:

Ver. 3-6, "*And the Scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto Him: Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the Law commanded us that such should be stoned; but what sayest Thou? This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him.*"

They acted and spoke thus in order to tempt Him. To wit, if the Lord, whom they called the "Friend of publicans and sinners,"

and who by His express word allows publicans and harlots to go into the kingdom of Heaven *before them*,—if He had received this woman kindly, and allowed her to drink out of the well of the forgiveness of sins, then would they have accused Him of being a contemner of the Law; but if He had consented to the forthwith stoning of the adulteress, then not only would His cheerful character as Redeemer and His gentleness as Jesus have been compromised in the estimation of the people, and His wells have been *closed* up to which the day before He had been so loudly inviting them, but they would have accused Him of contempt of the magisterial authority, as an abettor of Lynch-law. Thus did these hypocrites make their account, whilst they rose up as zealous for the law. But before we proceed, we must somewhat more closely examine the accusers of this poor woman.

“Moses in the Law commanded *us*” (Lev. xx. 10; Deut. xxii. 22-24), they say. Yes, Israel had this command. But were these accusers the appointed judges, who as the *Arm of God*, might take up the stone for the execution of this punishment? By no means. They set *themselves* up for judges, and their thought is that their own personal holiness entitles them to stone “*such*,”—people such as *they* of course were not. They are *Pharisees* whom Jesus has before Him, and not the lawful *magistrate*.

Ver. 6. “*But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.*”

“Man, who made me a Judge or a Divider over you?” (Luke xii. 14), a like repulse is surely the most obvious meaning of this gesture. “He stoops down, and writes for a while on the ground, He answers nothing, as though He heard them not. For He well knew that it would not be fitting for Him to answer them; they were besides not worthy of being answered, for this question was one which they had no business to bring before Him.” (Luther.)

Yet His writing was not without purpose. “Once,” says Bengel, “has God written in the Old Testament, viz., the Ten Commandments; once in the New Testament has Christ written.

We may see the meaning of this writing from the words that follow; it was as if He had said to them: Moses wrote the Law; I also have power to write, yea, the written Law of Moses is My Law. Ye Scribes write judgments against others; I also write, and against *you* (ver 26). Your sins are written upon the table of your heart," and your names in the earth (Jer. xvii. 1. 13), ("not in Heaven," as Augustine expresses the antitheses,—who knows but that He may have written down the names of the accusers?)

This My writing ye now understand not; but a time will come when what I have written shall be legible to the whole world. when the books shall be opened and when all your shame shall be revealed."

We may remember the writing of the man's hand in Dan. v. 5.

Ver. 7, 8. "*So when they continued asking Him, He lifted up Himself and said unto them: He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground.*"*

It is written in the Law: "The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him (who is worthy of death) to put him to death and afterwards the hands of all the people" (Deut. xvii. 7). Instead of *witnesses*, it is bold pharisaical *accusers* who stand here; instead of before the earthly judge, they stand before the Lord Jesus. They would then fain do what the Law assigns to witnesses; but as being witnesses before the Lord whose eye sees in secret and discovers the sin which cannot be reached by the stone thrown by human hand, even sins against the sixth commandment (Matt. v. 28), they have first a condition to fulfil: "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.*" But he that is *not* without sin, let him see to it well that the stone which his hand throws at the sinner does not rebound upon himself! The woman was taken in the very act; but see

* In a manuscript copy, the words here are: " . . . and wrote on the ground *the sins of each one among them.*"

the Lord takes her accusers also in the very act of sin,—sin, lying there exposed to His view; so that not a single one of them ventures to be the first to throw at this woman the stone which, in the sight of God, belonged also to him.

Thus does the Lord leave the law in its honour and in its condemning clearness; ay, and here as ever, He sharpens its slaying edge, so that it cannot but penetrate even into the conscience of a Pharisee, whilst He sends accusers as well as accused to the one same sinner's dock. But not as one appointed to carry out the punishment of the law does He speak, but rather pronounces a sentence fit for the lips of a Jesus. "This is His judgment: If there is one righteous, then the rest are none of them sinners; and if there is one who deserves punishment, then the rest must all be punished too. But if the sin of one is to be forgiven and remitted, then the sins of all are to be forgiven and remitted also. It is not this adulteress alone; there is not one of *you* who is not as sinful and as bad as ever this poor harlot may be" (Luther). Let our pride take a lesson from this where our place is before God. In every *crime* we can discern the features of our own *sin*, and it is no merit of ours, but only owing to God's grace, if the sin dwelling in our flesh does not in our case break out into open crimes as much as in ever any fellow-sinner. The old saying holds good, "Either we *are*, or we *were*, or we *may become* as this man is." True Christians are humbled by a brother's grievous fall; for therein they are reminded that *they too are not without sin*, and they gladly let the first stone lie, and condemn not in their own name (Luke vi. 37). Oh, that in moments of inward self-exaltation, the image of our Saviour might come before our eyes, as He is here seen stooping down and writing on the ground! Oh, that in every disgraced form of a sinner taken in the very act of sin, we may recognise *our own* likeness, as painted to our view by the infallible hand of the Searcher of hearts! How tender, how slow to anger, how merciful should we be!

For the rest, the attentive reader of the Bible hardly needs to be

reminded, that the Lord's answer does not take the sword out of the hand of God's appointed judge. If the judge be a believing Christian, every condemning sentence which he has to pronounce will work in him a salutary feeling of shame, because he knows that he is not without sin; but, nevertheless, he judges boldly, because he knows also that he derives his office, not from his own sinful person, but from God, who is without sin, and whose own holiness shines forth in the magisterial office (chap. x. 34). "God's are the sword, the fire, the water, and other punishment; He has commanded it, He will also have it so; it is *He Himself* who burns, hangs, and beheads offenders. If thou, prince, mayor, or judge, art also a villain or a knave, yet I must consider: it is God's sword that is delivered into his hand. And if *I* have any such office, and am myself a bad rascal, yet I say, Although I have deserved that my head should first be struck off, I must nevertheless judge, and let my own business stand over. But in Christ's spiritual kingdom it is not so. When thou comest there, thou wilt be as I, and I as thou, although before the world we are not equal. Then, if I am an adulterer, a thief, &c., and thou art not, it does not signify; for I find in myself far higher, greater stumbling-blocks, and therefore I am in such fright that I know not what will become of me; for in Christ's kingdom it is thus: *He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone*. Therefore, dear friends, spare, let the stone lie, neither will I take up one; let it lie, and without throwing at one another, let the stone fall, and say, Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us" (Luther).

Ver. 9. "*And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last.*"

The hands which already were holding the stones, sank down at their sides. The eldest, old sinners that they were, began first to go out; *their* register of sins was the longest, and they had no desire to expose themselves to the shame of having particular items in that register pointed out by the Lord's finger.

But—"whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, whither shall I flee from Thy presence?"

"Thus with this sermon He has pierced their hearts. For these words have an emphasis especially when He speaks to their hearts, and reveals their sins to them, so that God speaks with them; then their sins become so great, and they get so anxious and frightened, and have so much to do with their own sins, that they forget other people, and begin to think that, compared to them, all other sinners are quite saints. Thus with the thunder-clap are they struck with dismay; it is with them as if the lightning had flashed into the inmost recesses of their heart, so that hell itself appears there; their whole heart, like a register, stands open before them; they have altogether forgotten this woman; their whole thought is, that their sin stands written on their forehead, and that every one must see betrayed in their very looks what they have ever done; and not one dares to look his neighbour in the face. For they feel as if the very stones were looking at them, and they are impatient until they have escaped out of the door" (Luther). Yes, in them did Jesus show forth His glory; but it was His purpose to show it forth also in respect to the woman.

"And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."

She is not gone out with them. The stones of her accusers have spared her, and she might easily have slipped away; but the crushing, overwhelming stone of her own accusing conscience, is raised against her, and it is only with the man who has protected her from the stones of the Pharisees, that she knows of any refuge from this stone also, which threatens to crush her with merited destruction. There we see the difference between the Pharisees and this woman: the Pharisees, convicted by their conscience, go *away* from Jesus; the woman, convicted by her conscience, *remains* with Jesus: the Pharisees conceal and withdraw from the Saviour their sin, which yet they cannot deny; the woman surrenders her sin to Jesus, for the burden

of it she cannot bear. In short, the woman is penitent—the Pharisees are not. “Two were left alone—Augustine says—suffering and sympathy (*miseria et misericordia*). Thus it came to pass that the proceeding which the Pharisees were led to adopt through malignity, only served to drive a lost sheep into the arms of the good Shepherd.

Ver. 10, 11. “*When Jesus had lifted up Himself, and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.*”

No man has condemned the woman; not one has found himself without sin, so as that by virtue of his holiness he could condemn her (ver. 46). *But Jesus is without sin.* It would have consisted well if *He* had thought fit to throw the condemning stone at the woman, and no one would have dared to say, What doest Thou? But instead of this He says, “*Neither do I condemn thee.*” For not for this purpose did the only holy One appear amongst sinners, to condemn them, but to redeem them from their damnable sin, that they should not therein die and be lost (ver. 21). Therefore He proceeds immediately to say, “*Go and sin no more.*” With these words He condemns the *sin*, and saves the *sinner*. “Even the Lord condemned, but it was the *sin*, not the *man*” (Augustine).

This word in the mouth of Jesus is not merely a command—it carries with it the power also to fulfil the command. It is true He did not say expressly to this sinner, as He did on another occasion, “Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace;” but by bidding her *go and sin no more*, He holds out the hand to her awakening faith; she may hear if she will, and appropriate to herself the comfortable assurance of pardon contained in her Saviour’s words, “*Neither do I condemn thee;*” and thus freed from an evil conscience, she may through grace become willing and able to sin no more.

“Hast thou tasted what sin is, and what the law is; and dost

thou know the sorrow that sin causes? then look here and see, on the other hand, how sweet is the taste of that mercy of God which is offered in the Gospel. Such is the absolution which the Lord here speaks to the adulteress" (Luther).

Go and sin no more! Ah, how often does the Lord say this to us by the mouth of His servants! Timid consciences may well feel anxious at these words, for in "the body of this death" we cannot fulfil the command not to sin, otherwise than by falling and rising up again; we *begin* with this. Luther knows the true consolation with regard to this word; he says: "Through faith sins are forgiven, and the Holy Ghost raises up our soul and quickens it, that it no longer may *serve* sin, nor be its slave, but have dominion over it, and mortify, put to death the flesh. In this way our *captivity is turned*. For though wretched Satan never ceases to attack and plague us, he yet can no longer constrain us as lord and master; the Holy Ghost within us withstands his attempts. And although, through weakness, we at times stumble and fall, yet through repentance and faith in Christ we rise up again, and thus we do not perish and come to an utter end in sins" (Luther). Comp. chap. viii. 44; 1 John iii. 9.

The Light of the World.

CHAPTER VIII. 12-59.

(I.) I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, VER. 12-30.

O Lord Jesus, Thou who art the light of the world, enlighten us who are of the world and enshrouded in darkness, that we may know Thee, and in Thee may become light. Amen.

THE feast of tabernacles was over. The water of Siloah was no more poured out by the altar; the golden lights no longer burned in the fore-court of the temple. But like as Jesus Christ, the true Well of salvation, offered from His inexhaustible spring living water to all who were athirst, so also as the true *Light*, He shone with a never-dying lustre, in order that He might lead sinners out of the darkness of death into the light of life. What power the perishable, earthly light of the temple had, how impotent it was to enlighten the hearts of those who participated in the festival, had been exhibited to all in the narrative of this morning. In the midst of the bright shining of the tabernacle lights, that woman was wandering in the darkness of adulterous lust, and her accusers in the darkness of arrogant self-conceit. Not until the light of Jesus broke in upon the woman's heart did she become a penitent sinner, or forsake the love of darkness; whilst on the other hand, the Pharisees, when shone upon by the light of the Searcher of hearts, became convicted sinners, and went out because they loved darkness rather than light.

Referring now to the light kindled in the feast of tabernacles, as well as to what had occurred in relation to the adulteress, the Lord begins anew to discourse (ver. 2). "*I am*," so His discourse commences, and so it ends (ver. 58). What *He* is, and what *we* are; what we are *without* Him, and what we are *through* Him, we are now called to hear and learn.

Ver. 12. "*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*"

As the custom at this feast of drawing *water* had in the prophecy of Isaiah (chap. xii. 3) its interpretation, that prediction pointing forward to Christ, so the tabernacle *light*, used in the feast, was also accompanied by a prophetic word, which might have served to keep alive in the pious a longing for the glorious brightness of God, which was to go forth from Mount Zion and spread over all nations (Isa. ix. 2; xlii. 6; xlix. 6; Ps. l. 2). In Zech. xiv., where the glorious kingdom of Christ is set forth under the figure of a joyous celebration of a new Feast of Tabernacles, we read in verse 7: "*At evening-time it shall be light.*" As before, over the perishable water of the feast, the Lord had cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink," so here, referring to the candlesticks which but yesterday had given forth a bright lustrous light, but which now stood there dark and lustreless, He exclaims, "I am the light of the world."

St. John carried this word in his heart as an ever fresh material for devout reflection. In the short abstract of his gospel which we have at the beginning of chap. i., he describes the eternal Word as the *Light of the world*; while again his first epistle is a bright witness of and a pressing invitation to the *Light of Life* which appeared in Christ (1 John ii. 8). Here, in connection with what had just occurred, the Light of the world shines as the sweet sunlight of grace, as the light of the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His wings (Mal. iv. 2). He is the Sun of the spirits of all flesh, the "Day-spring from on

high," which has visited our darkness (Isa. ix. 1, 2). "He will light up you, ye weak and desponding hearts; those who are under His wings shall be fain to hear and see and feel this lustre, and they who believe in Him and take refuge, like chickens under the wings of the hen, even they shall be saved. He is a noble hen, a fine, clucking hen; to every one who creeps under His shelter He promises salvation and blessedness, eternal life, and forgiveness of sins; he shall want for nothing, for the Sun shall give him light" (Luther).

And the requirement that the Lord made of the woman upon whom the light of His grace had shone, "Go and sin no more," is now included in the word of promise: "*He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*" Once upon a time, the people had followed the light of the pillar of fire in the wilderness; and of this they were reminded by the light of the feast of tabernacles. But how many in the wilderness followed that light and yet wandered in darkness, because the light of life was not theirs!—they had it not! How many, too, were there now who rejoiced in the lustre of the tabernacle light, yet were wandering in darkness, because they too had not the light of life! Yes, how many *heard* the law read aloud in the assembly of the feast of tabernacles, and yet *learnt* it not (Deut. xxxi. 10, &c.), because they would not learn the End of the law, which was Jesus Christ! Thus they were shone upon by the light of Divine revelation, and boasted of being a people of light, and yet remained in darkness. Different is the case with the true *followers* of the light. Their following consists in faith, and faith makes Christ to dwell in their hearts (chap. xii. 36, 46; Eph. iii. 17); and because they then *have* the light of life, they no longer walk in darkness, neither in the *love*, nor in the *terror* of it; they no longer walk in *sins*, nor in *death*, no more according to the *pleasure*, no more in the *power* of the devil.

Together with Christ is His Church, also the light of the world (Matt. v. 14). A Christian walking in darkness is a

nonentity; we may as well talk of dark light, or leaden gold. Therefore St. John says, that whoever boasts of having fellowship with God, and walks in darkness, such an one has and does not the truth (1 John i. 6). But what do they do who admit Christ in His word into their understanding and with their lips profess Him as their light, and even wait upon Him with some cold works of outward service, while yet *in their heart they are following not His ways* (Ps. lxxxiv. 5), who do not believe and therefore have not the light of life? They degrade the true, eternal, living light into a light such as burnt in the court of the temple, whose brightness a man might enjoy and yet remain dark and dead in sins; they degrade the pure, reasonable service of Christians into a vain, lying worship (Rom. xii. 1), such as the worship of *those* Jews was who were quite satisfied in celebrating the unreal, lifeless shadow of light, while they sought to kill Him who Himself is light and life, and who is ready to prove Himself so to all who are wandering in darkness and death. Each time that Christ comes before us as our light (He does it in every word of holy Scripture), and each time that we call Him our light (we do it in every confession of His name), may He be known and glorified by us as the light of life, yea of the life which we *have*! This is to walk in the light (chap. xii. 35).

Ver. 13. "*The Pharisees therefore said unto Him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.*"

Being familiar with it from our childhood, we find nothing so very striking in a self-witness such as this: "*I am the light of the world.*" We know that it is the Son of God who thus speaks, and therefore we hear it without surprise. But he who believes not that in this Galilean Jesus, the fulness of the Godhead, the eternal Word dwells bodily,—such an one must take offence and be shocked at such words. In truth, it is a fact only to be explained by the dull, unthinking indifference and want of all conscientious seriousness with which men of the world treat Scripture, that those who deny the Godhead of

Christ yet profess to be admirers of what they call His wisdom and virtue. No, Scripture closes up against you this lukewarm middle path. You must have one of two alternatives only: either to worship at His feet: "My Lord and my God!" or, to execrate Him, and with the Jews to take up stones against Him as a blasphemer, who hath a devil: a third course, according to Scripture, according to the Gospel of St. John, there never can be; and indeed, in proportion as the number increases of those who with St. John behold His glory, and with Thomas bow the knee before Him, will the number of those diminish who, while denying His Godhead, yet are willing to spare His life as being a "divine teacher," and he who is the liar and murderer from the beginning does, with increasing decisiveness as time goes on, rise up amongst us with open, unmasked hatred of Christ.

Herod's vain host holds Thee in detestation,
And yet we hail Thee as our sole salvation;—

we are powerfully reminded of this when we hear the latest answer which the world gives to the question: "Whom say ye that I am?" They believe not, it is true, in the "God of the Jews," who can be blasphemed; but only the more vehemently do they believe in *themselves*, and they reject as a "blasphemy against man" or against "nature" the doctrine of Scripture and of the Church concerning Christ, without whom, man is a child of death, and nature a habitation of unclean spirits. Christians must not be surprised, if the heralds of ungodliness among the French are now proceeding so far as to prophecy that "within ten years it will come to pass that the State will punish as *criminal*, belief in Christ as the Son of God, as being a violation of the laws." The Scriptures must be fulfilled.

The Pharisees took Jesus for a man, who of himself *alone* was bearing witness of his merely human and therefore miserable *I*, when He said: "*I am* the Light of the world," therefore they could do nothing but reject this self-testimony. But here then their guilt lies, that after all the manifestations of His glory as the Son of God which had been vouchsafed to them, they never-

theless still knew Him not. Yet the Saviour, in His gentleness and unwearied love, still vouchsafes to hold parley with them, and He disdains not once more to testify to them that which He had already said to them in previous discourses in vain.

Oh, that the "word of His patience" may find compensation amongst *us* for all the trouble which He has at any time expended in vain! He truly speaks not only to those who then heard Him, but *before the world* (ver. 26).

Ver. 14. "*Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go.*"

In chap. vi. 31 the Lord had said: "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true," and perhaps the Pharisees now were retorting upon Him this very word of His. But they erred widely (comp. the Exposition of chap. v. 31). Yes, certainly, if Jesus bore witness of Himself *in the way* that the Jews imagined (ver. 16), if He *alone*, without the Father being with Him, called Himself the Light of the world, then His witness would not be true. But the Father bears witness of the Son; this we learn from chap. v.; and the Son as being one with the Father (chap. x. 30) bears witness with the Father of Himself; this we are taught in chap. viii. "We speak that *we do know* and testify that *we have seen*" (chap. iii. 11, 32), the Lord says. He knew *whence He came* as the eternal Word, and *whither He was going* as the incarnate Word, entering into His glory; therefore He could as a true witness bear witness of Himself, and say: "*I am the light of the world.*" But the Jews knew neither whence He was nor whither He was going, they merely saw in Him Joseph's son, a man, who would soon go the way of all flesh (chap. vii. 27); therefore *they* could not bear witness of Him as the light, unless, through believing acceptance of His testimony, they had become themselves sharers in this light; then would they "set to their seal that God was true" (chap. iii. 33). In His light only can we see light. The sun pours forth the beams

of his light, so that it becomes bright day, and we question not his being the sun, because he bears witness of himself; and shall we say to the eternal Sun, who is shedding His light upon us: "Thou bearest record of thyself, thy record is not true! Be that far from us! A light not only reveals other things, but itself also. Therefore the light bears witness of itself; the eye, if healthy, it brightens up and is its own witness that we may know it as being the light" (Augustine).

Luther is full of joyful praise of the blessed certitudo (certainty) which as a strong tower Christians possess in common with Christ. "Every Christian—he says—is a light of the world, for it appertains to him to know and feel sure what sort of a man he is, and how he stands in relation to God, and that he comes from God; he comes, having, through baptism, stepped out of Adam into Christ, into a Christian state, and is become a new man, and is destined to dwell for ever with God. On that footing do I live and bear the cross; then I know where I come from. I am indeed in myself nothing more than the old Jack or Jim that is born of Adam; but I am also a Christian: I have a name which is common to all, with all those who have been born anew with us of baptism; and after this life, I have heaven open before me, for me, together with all saints, to go in then. I am sure of my cause; my boast has a noble foundation. But heretics and enthsusaists are in great danger; they know not whence they come or whither they go, they are uncertain of their case and walk as in a dream."

Ver. 15, 16. "*Ye judge after the flesh: I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me.*"

Christ's *witness* of Himself includes also a judgment upon the world: if *He* is the Light of the world, then *without Him* the world is in darkness. When His heavenly light had flashed round Saul of Tarsus brighter than the sun, He placed him as a living torch of this light amid the darkened world (Acts xxvi. 13, 18). "He pronounced a severe sentence when He said: I

am the Light of the world. All the world is in blindness and darkness, under sin, death, and the devil; I alone am Light" (Luther). The Pharisees were quite right in drawing this conclusion; in their dark minds they felt the cutting severity of Jesus' words. Did it not seem as if the Lord, who through His lenity had just before put to shame the harshness of pharisaical judging, now meant that upon *them* the entire weight of His judgment should fall? Yes; and yet He guards against the notion that judgment is the *object* of His witness. Not for judgment, but for salvation, does He bear witness of Himself as the Light, and this witness only falls as a judgment upon him whose love of darkness deserves that incapacity of being saved, to which he is given over. And this judgment is a judgment of God. The Jews' judgment whereby they rejected Jesus, was a judgment *after the flesh*: the flesh of Jesus did not look to them as if the eternal light dwelt therein, they considered it as mere flesh, and *that* "profiteth nothing" (chap. vii. 63).

But the judgment of the word which became flesh, weighs heavier than they imagined. *He is not alone*, not like them and all men, whose *I* is a fleshy *I*, but He is in real oneness with the Father who sent Him; His *I* is a God-man's *I*, and in every word which He utters, in every: *I am* that He speaks, there is contained an: "*I and the Father*;" in every beam of His light as it reproves and condemns the darkness (Eph. v. 13), there shines forth the one Godhead of the Father and the Son. Therefore *His* judgment is not merely a so-called judgment, but a *real, genuine* judgment, since it will also never pass away. When *our* judgment is not the mere repetition of *His*, there the rebuke applies: "Who art thou that judgest another?" (James iv. 12).

"He might have said: If I judge, I judge not after the flesh as ye do, but after the Spirit. But He starts with the saying: *I judge no man*. He is not come for the purpose of judging; and we should not preach Christ nor believe in Christ as a judge, except it be that He means to save and redeem His own. Christ's office is to help. But he who chooses not to submit to

that, nor to be under Him who is ready to help, how can He make it otherwise than that he who will not have life shall be at liberty to have death? He says: Whoever will not follow me must feel that he continues a sinner, and then there follows thereupon the just sentence, that such an one choosing not to have righteousness must die in his sins. Thus it comes to pass that the office which otherwise is not appointed to judge, but only to help, is forced to judge. I still go on preaching God's mercy, but they who refuse that must have wrath. I must not and I cannot preach in any other way than this. I am not to say: Wilt thou have God's mercy, or wilt thou not? We are not thus to preach, but rather to say: Here thou hast the Gospel, which gives thee the forgiveness of thy sins. But if thou wilt not have the Gospel, nor accept God's mercy and compassion, then I say to thee this: Henceforth, Master Pope,—bishops, princes, and all the kit of you,—I excommunicate you; thou art the devil's, with all that belong to thee. This sentence I pronounce out of no delight or eagerness for the business; but because do it I must" (Luther).

Ver. 17, 18. *"It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me."*

Even the witness of two *men* was accounted as true according to the law (Deut. xvii. 6): how much more the witness of God, of the Father and of the Son! The Lord condescends to be measured by a law for men, for sinners,—a law on which the Jews leaned (in *your* law); but whilst He puts forward the two witnesses required by the law to prove the truth of His word: "*I am* the light of the world," He yet solemnly calls upon the Pharisees, and upon all to whom He would fain reveal Himself, that we should leave behind what is earthly, and soar above nature to

"Where God is one with human kind,
Where we perfect fulness find."

For in order that we may understand and receive as true testi-

mony the double witness concerning the light of the world,—the Father's witness of His incarnate Son (chap. v.), and Jesus' witness of His Divine glory,—we must put aside our proud reason, and humbly surrender ourselves to the voice of God, which here condescends to teach us and allure us to Himself. Comp. also 1 John v. 9. Without attention to this voice we remain blind to the light, even as the Jews did.

Ver. 19. *“Then said they unto Him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.”*

As afterwards Pilate, in the very presence of Truth itself, exclaimed: “What is truth?” so here, the Jews turn their back upon God who was shining upon them in Christ, and ask with contemptuous scorn: “*Where is thy Father?*” They sneeringly challenge Him to show them the Father who thus bears witness (in a spirit very different from that of Philip in chap. xiv. 8), for they knew of no witness—not they—which should be speaking on His behalf. Comp. the same sneering and violent temper shown in the sinners in Isaiah v. 19. The consequence is, that they remain blind in the very presence of the bright Sun, and they disown a God whom this Jesus calls His Father, showing thereby how fearfully true is that which the Saviour had said to them: “Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape, and ye have not His word abiding in you, for whom He hath sent, Him ye believe not.” On this account, in the Lord's reply, there again appears that sternness of the judge with which He had already spoken to them in chap. vii. 28. *“There are real thunder-claps. As if He would say to them: I will not let you fly off to the notion of fancying that you know the Father before you know me, or that you know the Father without me. There is a mighty text here in that He says: You are for going up into heaven and knowing God; but out of me and without me you know nothing about it. That is impossible: you will never know God without knowing me”* (Luther).

Ver. 20. *“These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as He*

taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on Him; for His hour was not yet come."

What had happened before (chap. vii. 30) was here again repeated, and this time in the *treasury*, where the crowd of people was greatest. And what a striking contradiction: the *treasury of God*, surrounded by a *people estranged from God*, whose offerings were as soulless as the very coin which was in the box!

Ver. 21. "*Then*"—after an interval—"said Jesus again unto them, *I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go ye cannot come.*"

Again Jesus converses with them; and every such "*again*" opens to us a fresh view of His glory. Who is indeed like Thee? Who loves, who bears with sinners, who goes out after them as Jesus does?

Again has He directed His gaze upon the hour of His departure. It is not, however, *His* dying, but *the dying of His enemies in their sins*, that wrings from Him a cry of woe (as Luke xxiii. 28). He is the Light of the world—but the Pharisaical world will not come to this light, because it is a light which judges sin, and which brings comfort to penitent sinners only. They will bring it about that He shall *go away* and after *that* they will grope in darkness, they will look for the light and there will be none, and they will *die in their sins*, lost in their sinful, unredeemed state, in the sin of their unbelief, out of which all other sins spring forth.

From Israel He *has* gone. To His believing people He has come again in the Holy Ghost, but there also Israel again withstood Him, and the Lord's departure from Jerusalem was repeated in the departure of the apostles (Mark xi. 11; Acts xii. 17). Thus did Jerusalem become "desolate" (Matt. xxiii. 38).

To the declaration in chap. vii. 33, which He here repeats, the Lord now adds: "*and shall die in your sins.*" The more sinners withstand Him, the plainer His words become, and the sharper are the arrows which they shoot forth into their hearts. Instead of finding Him and in Him life, they shall without

Him perish in the death of damnation, and be separated from Him by that great gulf over which they can never more pass to come to Him. Sin, indeed, even here in this life, separates man from God; but here he feels the wretchedness of His godless condition only in a sort of dull misgiving, partly because the chasm of worldly pleasure makes him forget for a time the soul's emptiness and silences her inward sighs, partly because the light of grace from which *he* would fain flee, does not as yet quite abandon *him*; but in eternity their complete separation from the light of life will become an indescribable sorrow to the condemned,—the dwellers in outer darkness. *On account of sin all die, even believers; but in sin, only unbelievers. Die in sin!—not to be able to come to Jesus!* O Lord, guard us from that danger, and grant that we may come out of sin to Thee, the Redeemer; out of death, to Thee who art life, now that we are able to come, even *to-day!* Amen.

Ver. 22. “*Then said the Jews, Will He kill Himself, because He saith, Whither I go ye cannot come.*”

Horrible! They had before in mockery bid Him as it were go to the Gentiles (chap. vii. 35,) now as a self-murderer they send Him to hell, whither they could not come to find Him.

“Oh, what love that thus undaunted,
Heard such bitter shame and scorn!”

Verily this eighth chapter of St. John is indeed a chapter of His Passion. “Consider Him that *endured* such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds” (Heb. xii. 3).

Ver. 23, 24. “*And He said unto them: Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you that ye should die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.*”

A gulf was already fixed between these children of the world and the Lord from heaven, the gulf between Beneath and Above, between darkness and light, between death and life,—a gulf

which was impassable to them unless they would yet *believe*. Christ, and with Christ Christians, go above, to heaven, because they are from above; they die not with this dying world, because they are not of this world; but the servants of sin and the devil go beneath, because they are from beneath; they die with this death-doomed world, because they are of this world. From beneath, out of the depth of the sea, did Daniel see four beasts arise which represent the four-membered power of the world; but from above, out of the clouds of heaven, appears the form of the Son of Man whose kingdom has no end (Dan. vii.).

But see how eternal love still stretches out her arms towards her gainsayers to snatch them from perdition! Twice does the Lord repeat the awful word: "*Die* in your sins," which rattles off from the hard cuirass of their security, although He would gladly have made it pierce into their hearts; twice He spans before their eyes the only bridge which can be between Beneath and Above, between the world and the kingdom of heaven, between death and life, in the words: "If ye *believe* not *that I am He*,"—that *I* am HE,—He in whom salvation has appeared,—He who is come *from above*—He who is *not* sprung *from this world*—He who is *not alone*, but, "*I and the Father that is with Me*;" and that *I* am the eternal Son of God, manifest in the flesh, the promised Redeemer from hell, the world, sin, and death; in short—*the Light of the world*. The Lord remembers the prophetic word: "That ye may know and believe me, and understand *that I am He*" (Isa. xliii. 10, 13, comp. Isa. xlviii. 12, and, which is the primary passage, Deut. xxxii. 39). The God of Israel is God, and beside Him there is none else; Jesus Christ is Saviour, and beside Him there is none else. Whoever believes not *in Him*, *believes not*, and "is damned" (Matt. xvi. 16).

"*I am He*, that is, I only am He, and it rests entirely with Me. You may search for God in every other direction, yet there is no life except in Me; therefore if you remain not here, you are in death. Now Christ is God; this John preaches concern-

ing Him; for no creature could have said it besides. It is too high a word. Faith is required for this high word." (Luther.)

Ver. 25. "*Then said they unto Him, Who art Thou? And Jesus saith unto them, even the same that I said unto you from the beginning.*"

The language here is very eager, as if they had said: "Humph, a likely thing that! Who are you, then, good master Jesus?" He might now have answered: "I am *Christ, the Son of God.*" This answer would have been just what they wanted in order again to blaspheme and abuse (chap. x. 24). But the hour of that solemn confession with which Christ met death, was not yet come (Matt. xxiii. 63, 64). If their faith was not awakened by His *discourse*, if they would not know Christ by the Christ-like *words* which He spoke,* He would not thrust upon them the knowledge of Him, and they should not see His glory. "Who art Thou?" Had He not then told them who He was? Yes indeed, but they believed not, they understood not His speech; they believed not that He was what He spoke, that in His *words* He revealed His *Being*, as He at once both *is* and *speaks* the eternal Word of God. Neither men, nor even Christians, not angels even, can dare to say that of themselves. In their case, God says: "Behold I put my words in thy mouth." But the Son of God *is* the Word which He *speaks* concerning God; He *is* Himself God's doctrine, the saving Substance of all God's discourse. He is not alone the Preacher and Witness of the light, as John the Baptist was, but in His case it runs thus: "I AM *the light of the world.*"

All along from the first He says: From the beginning I am what I say unto you. He directs them before all things to His word, in which faith is to recognise Him. Comp. Isaiah lii. 6: "Therefore my people shall know my name, therefore they shall know in that day that *I am He that doth speak, behold, it is I.*" Also Ezek. xii. 25. *Hereafter*, when they shall see the

* It was the same with the Samaritan woman; to her Jesus says: "*I that speak unto thee am He.*" Comp. also chap. ix. 37.

exalted Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven, then will they be convinced by the terrors of His judgment, of that which they would not believe from the word of His mercy.

When Jesus calls thee in His word to be converted to Him if thou desirest not to die in thy sins, and thou also dost ask : “ *Who art Thou ?* ”—then receivest thou this answer : “ *I am what I say unto thee.* ” If thou wilt embrace Him in His word, and like Mary, give thyself up to what He *says*, then wilt thou learn what sort of a Jesus He is, that He is a mighty Saviour, who is made thy bridge between hell and heaven. But if thou thinkest to know His name except in the word that He speaks, thou wilt miss Him, neither wilt thou see Him until thine eyes are dazzled by the terrors of His great power and glory.

“It is of no good to say it either to those keen geniuses who would fain conceive and describe and understand and know God and what God is by means of their own sharp-sighted thoughts: nothing will come of it. He will not be known by means of any man’s reason, only through His word. No one shall have any thing to do with our Lord God by means of naked thought; for that is assuredly the devil, and that is what all heretics do. But thus thou wilt not know God. For as He here says: Wilt thou know who I am? I am first He who discourse unto you. But thus ye shall not lay hold on me; I will be uncomprehended.” (Luther.)

Ver. 26. “*I have many things to say and to judge of you: but He that sent Me is true, and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him.*”

That which the Lord was saying to them (ver. 25), wherein He revealed what He was, was spoken in particular reference to *their sin*, it was a discourse of judging, a *reproving* utterance of the Light (chap. iii. 20). Their conscience He felt constrained to fasten upon, and to shew them that they were of this world (ver. 7), ay, and from beneath, fast bound in sin and darkness, guilty of damnation; for He, the Light of the world, could not else shine upon them for their deliverance. But the world likes

not now more than then, to hear such saying and such judging (let us take heed to what the Lord here says :—for what He says, He says *to the world*, to the *whole* world, therefore it applies to us too).

The world dislikes not, indeed, to hear much concerning God and Divine things, and will learn by its understanding what God is ; but they cannot endure the finger which writes out their sins before their eyes ; man does not like to answer the first confessional question : “Dost thou believe that thou art a sinner ?” and yet it is only by crossing the threshold of this question concerning his sins, that he can reach the sanctuary of a consoling knowledge of God. The world may or may not like to admit what its light reprovngly and judgngly reveals : it is yet *true* ; for “He that *sent* Me is *true*, and I speak to the world *those things which I have heard of Him*.” God will prove honest and true in respect to the words of His Son ; it will be seen when the despisers of the Lord Jesus die and go away in their sins, that the true God was present and spake through the faithful and true life of His Son, and that He has proved Himself to be the Father who sent Him (chap. v. 30).

But Christians know from blessed experience that what the servant of God says is true : “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary ; He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.”

“He that sent Me is true. This is the seal which Christ stamps upon His word, and with which He comforts Himself. *We also* can say to the world : Well, we have preached to you and judged you ; we have much to say of you, let us not threaten in vain. But what matters it ? It is the truth, it must come to pass and none can hinder it. For He that has sent Me, the Father, He it is that has commanded it, who also has given Me His word ; I will wait and see whether He who is above shall be a liar concerning you ; I comfort myself with this and play the man boldly ; you may rage if you will, and despise our preaching

as much as you please ; mock and disregard our threats ; come to pass, however, it will, whatever sorrow it shall bring to all of you : I shall wait and see whether God will be pleased Himself to be a liar, or you." (Luther.)

Ver. 27. "*They understood not that he spake to them of the Father.*"

But St. John understood it, and in this parenthesis he expresses his painful surprise at the guilty blindness of the Jews who would not see the glory of the only begotten Son (ver. 19). Just as in chap. xii. 37. That He had called *God* His *Father* they understood well enough, but that He bore witness to God in the words of His mouth, as the Father for *their* true comfort and salvation,—this was what they did *not* understand.

Ver. 28, 29. "*Then said Jesus unto them : When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father hath taught Me I speak these things. And He that sent Me is with Me : the Father hath not left Me alone, for I do always those things that please Him.*"

"I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me : " this the Lord now repeats for the last time, as even now they would not discern that what He spoke and that He Himself was the eternal Word of the *Father*. The communion of the Son with the Father, the mystery of the Man Christ Jesus, who is the Son of God, whose speaking and doing was an ever unclouded mirror of the well-pleasing will of God,—this sanctuary the Jews understood not, because they had not God's word abiding in them (chap. v. 38). There was to be a time when they should *know* and *feel* what now they did not discern. When they advanced the *Son of Man*—Christ, the Lord of Glory who was crucified in *weakness*—by the *lifting* Him *up* upon the cross to the demonstration of His Life in the power of God (chap. xii. 32) ; when there were heard the powerful sermons of God, who leaves not His Son alone (for "behold My servant whom I uphold," Isaiah xlii. 1 ; chap. xxvi. 32), who leaves Him not alone in the hour of suffering, not even then when the Son cried : "My

God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—when the sun was darkened, the veil of the temple was rent, the rocks yawned asunder; when Christ came forth out of His grave, a Prince of Life, ascended into heaven, sat down at the right hand of power, waiting until His enemies be made His footstool; when the first strokes of that judgment to which He since then *comes* in the clouds of heaven, fell with crushing power upon hardened Israel, and upon the holy city, now left desolate, and thousands died *in their sins*: then, they felt and knew—with trembling heart felt and knew—that *it was He*, He their Saviour and King whom they had rejected,—He the obedient Servant whom God had recognized and whom they had crucified,—He, the true Life of the world, the faithful and true Witness whom they had not believed,—He, the beloved Son of the Father, in whom they had scorned to become accepted with God. Oh, may that grace which is to-day yet hovering round our souls, deliver us from the terrors of such a knowledge! So that it may likewise be said of us who now hear His word, as it is written, that:

Ver. 30. "*As He spake these words, many believed on Him.*"

He perceived that the virtue which went out from Him, the virtue of His words, had fastened on their hearts (ver. 37: comp. Luke viii. 46). The mysterious echo which spirit gives to the voice of God when it has been heard, and which even from time to time refreshes also His poor servants,* sounded in His listening ear and indeed also in that of His disciple John, and with exulting joy He now addresses His words to these first fruits of the children of light. But this we shall reserve for the next reading.

* Yet, "even if a man had no one around him of whom he could feel assured that he had received and understood the word, yet it is his duty still to go on preaching—a 'preacher in the wilderness.' Francis of Assisi used to preach to the fishes: many souls there are who can hear no better than fishes" (*Heubner on Matt.* iii. 1).

(II.) WHY DO YE NOT UNDERSTAND MY SPEECH? VER. 31-59.

O Lord, open, we pray Thee, our hearts, that we may hear Thy word and keep it. Amen.

WE have already seen that this eighth chapter of our Gospel is a chapter relating to our Lord's Passion; and to-day again the patience of the holy God in enduring all the dishonour heaped upon Him, will force us to cry out anew: "Oh, suffering, spotless Lamb of God!" The pious fathers also thus regarded this chapter, and have appointed the verses from the 48th to the end of the chapter, to be read as the Gospel for the fifth Sunday in Lent.

The discourse commencing with the words: "*I am the light of the world,*" has hitherto had for its subject: "*I am He.*" It is He indeed; He who says: "*I and the Father,*" through whose truthful mouth two bear witness—the Father in the Son, and the Son in the Father; *He is* the true Light. "And the light shineth in *darkness*, and *the darkness comprehended it not:*" this lament of St. John's is in the same strain as that which the Lord made use of: "*Why do ye not understand my speech?*" But in this sorrowful discourse; spoken by Him who is Light, with the degenerate children of Abraham who were walking in darkness without the light of life, the darkness which will not comprehend the light, comes before us in a shape actually appalling. The reason *why* they could not comprehend the light, the cause of their dark unbelief, the Lord in His discourse now discloses, and that with a severity dividing asunder the joints and marrow, and piercing, as He proceeds, deeper and deeper into their inmost conscience. Yet in the midst of these sin-condemning beams of light which emanate from the only Holy One, He yet at the same time shines as the *Sun of mercy and grace* to the world. Not only towards souls capable of receiving Him, who

have begun to believe in the light, does His gentle tenderness incline, in order to lead them on to know the truth, and to receive freedom in the truth, when known ; but also to those who have closed their eyes against the light does He extend the saving arms of His love, repeating the precious promise, sealed with His holy " Verily," that whoever will follow Him shall not walk in darkness, shall not die in his sins, but shall have the light of life : "*Verily, verily, I say unto you : if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*"

Ver. 31, 32. "*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed ; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*"

The emphasis rests on *Continue*. The Lord's word had *found a place* in these Jews ; their heart assented to it and cried out within them : " Yes, it is He ! He will save us from our sins."

This little spark of belief, St. John hesitates not to call *belief* — a fact not without consolation. Even the smallest beginning of faith brings thee in real contact with the Saviour, and He quenches not the smoking flax. But have you begun to believe ? All, however, depends upon your *continuing*, for temptation will not be long in coming (Luke viii. 13), as here it came forthwith to them that believed in the mocking words of them that believed not. In every such temptation let the word of Christ graciously abide in us, and let us faithfully abide in His word, then we *are become in truth* that which faith makes men, disciples of Jesus Christ (comp. especially chap. xv. 8). Yes, if to-day we *are* His, because through His grace we believe, then let us pray that we may *continue* His, that we may persevere even to the end ; and that we may truly continue *in His word*, for out of His word we can never continue in Him. The apostolic Church *remained stedfast* in the Apostles' doctrine, and then it was the *true* Church of Christ's disciples ; and to all eternity, the right Church is that which continues in her Lord's word, not lightly, but

heartily and earnestly praying: "Keep me in Thy doctrine, Lord!"

By continuing in Christ's word, His disciples will indeed *know the truth*: so proceeds our Lord's discourse. "Thou hast the words of eternal life," was Peter's confession, "and we *believe* these words of life, and *are sure* that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." The word of Christ, because it is the word of the true God, *is* truth; he who continues through faith in this word, who allows himself to be illumined ever more and more by its light, will *be sure* of that which remained hidden from the scornful Jews, "*that*—in our Lord's words—*I am He*." In Him, in fact, is present the truth of God, His gracious truth, for through Him came grace and truth. He is its faithful revealer, and in His own self is its saving import (chap. xiv. 6).

Blessed is he to whom it is given to know the truth; for the *truth shall make him free*. Truth when known, *i.e.* when it is become the possession and the treasure of a man's life, will *make him free*.^{*} Without knowledge of the truth, all shall die in their sins; by virtue of the knowledge of the truth they shall live, they shall share the life of Christ who is Truth and Life, for they shall become *free* from *sin* and from all that has come upon them in consequence of sin, and which prevents them from being what it is the will of God that they should be. To *desire* to be and to *be able* to be that which it is the will of God we should be: this is what constitutes Christian *freedom*, the precious fruit of sonship with God in Christ, in whom that which was to all lost in Adam has been for all again won. "The grace of God in Christ heals the will, so that righteousness is freely loved" (Augustine). St. Paul richly extols the freedom of the true disciples of Christ, and confesses with joyful confidence, that through the knowledge of the truth of God in Christ he has been made free (Rom. vii. 18; viii. 2, 15; Gal. v. 1; and in many other passages); but, at the same time, he longs for the

* Even the heathen knew something of this. Cicero says: "The wise only are free." But they understood nothing either of Divine wisdom or of Divine freedom.

completion of the freedom whose first-fruits he enjoys by faith, and he sighs for deliverance (as he says) from the "body of this death" (Rom. vii. ; viii. 23). The fulfilment of the promise: "*The truth shall make you free,*" shall not have its perfect glorious accomplishment until it shall appear what the children of God shall be, viz., *like Him*, in the perfect intuitive knowledge of the truth, *seeing Him as He is* (1 John iii. 2); until Christians shall become as perfectly *holy* and without sin after the pattern of Jesus Christ, as now through faith in His merits they are righteous without aught in them which incurs God's condemnation.

Ver. 33. "*They answered Him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, ye shall be made free?*"

It would have been insufferable to the despisers of Christ amongst the crowd of people swarming about the temple, if they had heard the *believers* who had here been particularly addressed by Jesus, answer Him with anything like a confession of their faith in Him. The faith of these Jews who had seemed likely to become the disciples of Christ, arraigned the others from whom the Lord had separated them by an emphatic "*Ye*" (ver. 31), in the most striking manner of guilty unbelief. Therefore they hasten to interrupt the Lord's words, which to the believers were words of blessing, but to *them* of judgment, and to *answer*, as John says, in the name of those to whom the promise had been intended: "*The truth shall make you free.*" Their answer is also designed to arouse the Jewish pride in the "*seduced*" believers, and it has this meaning: If the truth of which thou speakest is only of advantage to *bondsmen*, then spare us from having it who are *Abraham's seed*! (Gen. xviii. 6, 7 ; xxii. 17 ; Deut. xiv. 1). We are a free-born royal nation and acknowledge no man as our master, only God. To Him we belong as children and to none else, that is the *truth* which makes us free! To be sure, when later it served the purpose of their enmity against Jesus, the same Jews could afterwards exclaim, ay, and

even their rulers: "We have no king but *Cæsar*," but here they boast of the nobility of their Abrahamic descent, a nobility which forsooth might scorn, as of old Egypt and Babylon, so also very shortly the Roman *Cæsar*! No one can take that from them! So blind were they in their pride, that they did not perceive *that* tyrant and his enslaving oppression who had his seat nearer to them than in Rome, and who even now was robbing them of Abraham's *blessing*. This proud Jewish freedom has many admirers in the present day, only that, in the place of Abraham, is placed for the stock of descent human nature.

In the Lord's answer, verses 34 to 36 relate in a more especial manner to the "believers," for the purpose of strengthening their faith, for whom His gainsayers had made reply (in which reply, perhaps, some of the others had joined, not exactly perceiving its import). Not till verse 37 does He begin to meet His enemies with the words of a judge.

Ver. 34-36. "*Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*"

Such is His declaration concerning slavery and freedom—a declaration which the natural man not only does not understand, but which is even obnoxious to him. His *Verily, verily*, here, as it always does, places that which really exists in opposition to that which is imaginary; that which is true to that which only seems; that which is eternal to that which is temporal. (Chap. iii. 3, 5; x. 7).

Free, indeed, is man created, after the image of God, through his life being in union with the holy and blessed life of God. To do the will of God with the will, and to serve Him in love without fear, this is freedom; but he who *commits sin*, tearing himself away from God, and opposing himself to God's will, is in *bondage* and *not free*, for his conscience, the voice of the defaced image of God within him, utters a powerless *No* to the

ungodly activity in the committing of sin, and, as a *slave*, he does what is wrung from him by his wicked lusts. Let any one look into his own personal experience : there he sees written, in characters of fire, “ *Whoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.*” Thou art not lord over sin to employ it in thy service, so that thou canst say to it, So far, no further ! but sin, when thou dost commit it, has thee in bondage as its dependant, and, obedient to the almighty nod of the avenging God, it drags thee away whither thou thinkest not (Rev. xxii. 2.)

This was Ahab’s way, who had *sold* himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord (1 Kings xxi. 20-25.) From the time of Cain, whose “desire” was to sin, and who allowed himself to be ruled by it, instead of “ruling over it” (Gen. iv. 7) in God’s strength, this ignominious bondage under a power which works our destruction, is the inheritance of all the sons of Adam, and only Abel’s *pious* race obtain emancipation from this bondage under sin, through *the Son*, the serpent-Treader, in whom Abel hoped, and who here talks with us.

The expression, *the servant of sin*, sets forth fallen, lost man’s deepest degradation and shame ; but yet at the same time it expresses also his expectation of a deliverance through Him who should “bring out the prisoners from the prison,” set free those who were captives of the strong man, and take the spoil from the armed man (Isa. xlii. 7 ; xlix. 24 ; Luke xi. 22). Yes, God be praised, we can be delivered from the bondage of sin, which is not our *nature*, but the *destruction* of our nature—a foreign and enslaving power. Beautifully Claudius says (in his A, B, C) :—

“In thee there is a noble slave,
Who from thee freedom ought to have.”

If man acted of *his own self* when he commits sin (ver. 44), he would not merely be of the devil, but a devil himself, and there would be nothing left in him which could be redeemed. Therefore is the sin against the Holy Ghost, which the devil

committed in his fall, and continues to commit, and which is repeated in men when they obstinately withstand the truth, and wilfully give themselves up to lies, and to the father of lies (wherever *Satan enters into him*, as Scripture says)—the one sin unto death, from which there is no more any deliverance.

Therefore, to set them free from the *bondage of sin*, the Jews needed the truth, which alone makes free. But were they not, being Abraham's seed, possessors of all God's covenant blessings? Was God to have, and to endure to have, servants of sin in His house? Answer: "*The servant abideth not for ever.*" Because they were *servants* in the worst sense—*servants of sin*—they should not *remain* in the house of God, where an eternal habitation is only prepared for the Son of the house. Was not Ishmael also of Abraham's seed? But because he was not born by promise, but after the flesh, and *persecuted* him that was born after the Spirit, he was cast out of the house as the servant, and was not permitted to share with the son in his inheritance (comp. Gal. iv. 22).

Of *these* children of Abraham, Ishmael is the type. Blots are they, not children (Deut. xxxii. 5, E. V). As they trod in Ishmael's steps, in persecuting and killing the true Isaac, the real seed of Abraham (Gal. iii. 16), to whom pertained the blessing, therefore they, like Ishmael, must be cast out, unless *the Son*, who abideth ever, should make them sharers in His abiding. Yes, when the Son of Abraham, who is also the Son of God, bestows upon a man the glorious freedom of sonship with God, and appoints him to be joint-heir with Himself, then is he made free, free *indeed*—not in name only, but really and truly; free, not from tyrants—who at the most can kill the body—but free from the tyranny of sin, which leads to eternal destruction; he is free as the Son is free, and abideth ever in the house where the Son abideth ever, among the chosen number of the free-born children of the heavenly Sarah, of the Jerusalem which is above, that is free, and the mother of us all.

Ver. 37, 38. "*I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye*

seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father."

That which made *Abram* to be *Abraham* was God's gracious covenant with him (Gen. xvii.), in which he stood by *faith*; and the whole history of his life is summed up in the words of the apostle Paul; "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform; and therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness." In his heart he had thoroughly *laid hold* on the word of promise, he had firmly fastened on it as with the sharp tooth of an anchor; therefore the whole aim of his life was turned towards the promised Seed to whom the blessing pertained, as the Lord afterwards says: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day."

Exactly contrary to Abraham are now these Jews who boast of him as being their father. They also see the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, but without rejoicing; ay, and Him towards whom Abraham's heart bounded with rapture *they seek to kill*. For whilst Abraham's soul received the word of promise, and was wholly penetrated by it, Christ is obliged to say to them—He in whom the promise is yea and amen—"My word hath no place in you." The word in the original which is rendered by *hath place*, expresses the powerful operation of the living word of God (Heb. iv. 12), when, fastening upon the heart, it forces itself in, and pushing forward, establishes for itself a place therein. "Man must *abide* in the word, the word *lay hold* in the man" (Bengel). But it cannot lay hold, it cannot push forward in the heart, if man obstinately locks up the way against it. And that the Jews did in their hatred to Jesus; they had, in committing sin, given themselves up to be the servants of one who took away the word from their heart (Matt. xiii. 19). This they had not learnt from *Abraham*; their enmity against Jesus, their obdurateness to His word, had another father than

Abraham, not the friend, but the foe of God. Christ's word, which the Jews believed not, was the word of the same God as Abraham believed in, for "*I speak that which I have seen with my Father,*" Christ says, as the Son who was come from the Father into the world; therefore it must have been a wicked father, and not Abraham, nor the God of Abraham, who taught the Jews to act as they did. Not till verse 44 does the Lord mention this wicked father by name, the *devil*. He hesitated so long that He might give them time to examine their own conscience as to the author of their wickedness, and to be sensible of their sin, through which the devil had got them into his enslaving power. "See the great tenderness of Christ? He yet spares them, and will not at once plainly say that their father is the devil" (Melanchthon). But they did not turn their inquiries in upon themselves; the word of Christ *had no place* in them.

Ver. 39-40. "*They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father.*"

They were indeed Abraham's *seed* after the flesh, as Ishmael was; but not in truth and according to the spirit were they the *children* of Abraham (Rom. ix. 7)—children in whom the works of Abraham were reproducing themselves. Comp. Gen. xviii. 19. He who was Abraham's Life by faith—*Him they sought to kill*. This is the work of the *murderer of man* (ver. 44), who is the foe of all the Seed of the woman, but especially of *that* Seed of the woman which appeared in the *man* Jesus Christ (Gen. iii. 15); the work of the *liar* who is the sworn adversary to all truth, but in the highest degree to that perfect revelation of *the truth* which has appeared in Christ who delivers man out of his power. "Thus they also now despise the word and are themselves hostile to it. Tell the world, however it drives the

matter, it will soon fain have those dead who teach the truth. It persecutes the truth through lies, and will not endure it; that is, they will have *God struck dead!*" (Luther.)

Let us also take to heart what Bogatzky remarks on these words of the Lord: "*This did not Abraham!*" "This casts to the ground all carnal vain-glory, when any in our Church boast of *Luther* being their father in the faith, and who yet have nothing of the mind, or spirit, or faith, or works of Luther."

Ver. 41. "*Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication: we have one Father, even God.*"

They rightly perceive that the Lord is speaking of spiritual fatherhood, and they now ascend from Abraham to God as their only Father, besides whom they had none. As if they said: If we do the works of *our father*, we do the works of *God*: for we are not born of fornication, we are not the children of a harlot, like the Samaritans (Ezek. xvi.; Hos. ii). Israel is the wife of one, viz., of God, and the children of Israel are children of God (Ex. iv. 22).

The boastful words of these Jews, mistaking flesh for spirit, cast a clear light upon the expression: "Sons of God, which are born not of blood, but of God."

Vers. 42, 43. "*Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but He sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.*"

They were not *Abraham's* children, for they sought to kill Him who is Abraham's Desire and Joy; neither were they *God's* children, for they had not the *love* of God in them, but hated Him whom God loves as His only-begotten Son, as His "heart's dear crown," who with a Saviour's willingness had *come out* from His Father, and *came into* the world (chap. vii. 28), *sent* to be its Light and Life. If God were their Father, and they God's children and house-mates, must they not have known the *speech* of their home, their mother-tongue? So strange is the

Son of God to His Father's lost children, that they *do not even understand His speech!* And why not? He Himself gives the answer: "*Even because ye cannot hear my word.*" The matter strange, the utterance strange. They could not hear His *word*, the substance of His *speech*, for this word is foolishness to the natural man, he *cannot* know it (1 Cor. ii. 14). They had no inward ear for the truth which Jesus was speaking to them, therefore also in His speech they recognised not the speech of God and that of all His holy servants—the speech which out of the Scriptures was discoursing to them (chap. v. 37-39; Heb. i. 1).

If it is the fact that many at the present day do not see the glory which is revealed in the speech of Jesus Christ, as in that of the living God; and that the Holy Scriptures are to them as it were written in unknown characters, and that they read the English Bible, and understand no more of it than if it were Chinese:—the reason of all this is that His word, His word concerning sin and grace, concerning death and life—in short, *the word of the Cross* (1 Cor. i. 18), the Gospel for poor, lost, condemned man,—they cannot hear! It is a judgment from God that to many the language of truth sounds as gibberish, as "stammering speech" (comp. Isa. xxviii. 11). They *can* not hear? They cannot; but their *cannot* is the consequence of their *will not*, as Chrysostom says: "Then why *could* they not? Because they *would* do the lusts of their father, the devil."

Ver. 44. "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*"

Thus does the Lord Jesus at length name the father to whom, by *willing* to do his lusts, they had given themselves up to be children. This *will* is a fearful word. Before, we read: "Who-soever committeth sin is the *servant* of sin." Now we learn that this bondage is a *guilty* bondage, because the lust, the

pleasure of man for sin agrees with the lust, the pleasure of the devil who seduces him to sin. "The lusts of the devil ye *will* do:" this shows the clear and sharply-marked line of separation which distinguishes between the sin of believers and the sin of unbelievers. Even true Christians must ever continue—"until the earth is shoveled over them," as Luther says—to confess: "In many things we offend all," and alas, do but too often according to the lusts of the devil!

We fully realise in our own life the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans; and if they were right who hold that in this chapter the holy Paul is speaking only of his experience *before he believed*, we should then be driven to despair. But to *WILL* to do the devil's lusts is no longer the case with Christians. "It is a frightful *will*, and as frightful a *must*, which governs the soul of an ungodly man. Such a soul either is a slave of the *must*, or a free agent of the *will*; and the most fearful feature of all is that it is guilty as being a free agent, and the more guilty it is so much the more enslaved, and therefore the more it is free to will by so much the more enslaved" (Augustine). Well, but if it is so, yet, let not the sin which we have have *us*! It always "besets," clings to, us, and is a "weight" (Heb. xii. 1) about us; but never let our will cling to it, but as a work of the devil let us allow ourselves to be willingly delivered from it through repentance and faith in the Son of God, the victorious Destroyer of all the works of the devil: then we shall *not will* to do what is the devil's lust, neither shall we fulfil the lusts of the flesh which he commands (Gal. v. 16).

In the concluding words of this verse, the Lord's eye rests upon His own personal enemy, the devil, who has darkness for his element, who does not love darkness *rather* than light, like men who are seduced by him, but absolutely loves darkness and absolutely hates light. There is a fearful judicial severity in Jesus' words; but they are yet full of goodness; for they paint before the eyes of sinners the image of the original, personal author of sin, if perchance sinners might recognise in this mirror

their own sinful likeness thereto, and be terrified at themselves, at the depravation of their own being.

“*He was a murderer from the beginning.*” These words mean : from the *beginning* of life, of which life the devil is the murderer (1 John iii. 8). As soon as in paradise he saw a blessed life in the truth, reflecting the image of the living God—not in angels’, but in human nature, then a *jealousy* of life was aroused in the prince of death (Wisdom of Sol. ii. 24). And after he had by the lie : “Ye shall not surely die,” torn men away from life in the truth of God, and thus had only to deal with mortal sinners, he began with delight in the work of destroying, to kill and commit murder on the earth, and this, too, with all the greater fury, because he perceived the victorious Seed of the woman, the Son of Man, connected with the race of man, which though lost, was yet, as he saw, by God’s mercy again found, and because he saw the light of life shining in the midst of the darkness of that very death of which he “had the power” (chap. i. 5 ; Heb. ii. 14). From Abel down to the innocent babes at Bethlehem extend the victories of his murderous hate, of which the proper and final aim is Jesus ; and as Cain lived again in Herod to do the devil’s lust, so the enemy of the Church, “the great red dragon,” will never want followers of Herod, to perform like him his works on the “woman and her child,” on Christ and Christendom, until the time when the whole perfected Church shall join with one resounding voice in the triumphal song : “Now is come salvation and strength and the kingdom of God and the power of His Christ.”

“The world is a den of murderers, subject to the devil. If we desire to live on earth, we must be content to be guests in it, and to lie in an inn where the host is a rascal, whose house has over the door this sign or shield : *For murder and lies*. For this sign and escutcheon Christ Himself hung over the door of his house, when He said : “He is a *murderer* and a liar,” (Luther.) Therefore the Saviour saw in the lust of these Jews to kill Him the lust of the murderer of men from the beginning,

who now desired to accomplish on the Son of Man that monster murder of his, without which all his other murders were in vain ; and the Jews did, ay, they *desired* to do what they had seen with their father. In like manner, St Paul sees in the Jewish sorcerer, Elymas, who sought to turn away the Cyprian governor from his faith, “a child of the devil” (Acts xiii. 10).

But did not the Jews perceive the devil’s deceitfulness, who was trying to force *them* on to die in their sin when it was “finished” (James i. 15), and was urging them to the murder of Jesus as to an act of *self-murder* ? No ; for the devil, who as well as a *murderer* has also been a *liar* from the beginning, had known how to make the truth hateful to them. “Can *this man* be the Son of God ? Can His speech be that of God ?” So spake the old serpent to them ; and because they desired to believe not, and had no love for the truth, they believed the lie, and could not see in Jesus the Lord of Glory (2 Thess. ii. 10, 11 ; 1 Cor. ii. 8). The devil indeed knew Him well. There was a time when he was worshipping with holy spirits, the first-fruits of the creation, before the throne of God and of His eternal Son ; but *he abode not in the truth*. He made light of *continuing* therein, and therefore did not, as the holy angels, obtain an eternal *footing* in the truth, did not take up his abode in it as in the sanctuary of his love, *does not remain* therein as in his abiding possession (Jude 6). Out of himself, out of his own inner being, did he fetch the lying thought of being his own lord and god, of being able to live not in obedience to God and joy in God. Then, in the moment that he conceived this lie, he suddenly fell,* *like lightning*, Christ says ; and since that time he finds no abiding-place in the region of truth, *for truth is not in him*. He leads a falsified life, separated from the true life’s

* Worthy of all consideration is the view which has lately been imparted to me by a friend, that the temptation of the first man went immediately along with the *fall* of the devil. By humbly rejoicing in the crown of all God’s creation, man, the holy angels had continued in their dominion ; by proudly envying man, one of the angel-princes, together with his followers, became the devil.

foundation of every creature, and thus, *dead* in himself and yet not destroyed, he is living, personal Death. Into the torment of this contradiction: "*I am—and I am for ever dead,*" into the horrible emptiness of his godless existence he now endeavours to plunge men as well, whilst he cajoles and bewitches them into the notion that a life without God is a true life. This lie, the beginning of his own destruction, comprehends also the sum of his wickedness. He feels, indeed, the pain of being a condemned liar, but he repents not of the lie, and never can repent of it, for he possesses no inner being out of the lie which could say *No* to the lie, or which might stretch itself out longingly towards the truth. *When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own*, he exists of sheer lies, to lie has become his second nature, his element of death; for *he is a liar* and nothing else; not a misled *child* of lies, but *the father of them*, the arch liar and the arch enemy of truth, truth having nothing in him by which she might lay hold of him and draw him to herself. What shews itself in the enslaved children of lies as the work of their father, the devil, viz., that the word of truth has no *place* in them, is the everlasting condition which the devil has brought upon himself.

But what leads the Saviour in this discourse to unveil before our eyes the devil's history? He wishes to inspire the inmost heart of His present and all future hearers with fear and trembling, lest they should perish by walking in the way of that great murderer and liar. The murderer from the beginning is also now in activity, endeavouring to destroy life. Jesus Christ he was not able to kill, to hold in death; therefore he tries now to kill Him in His members; and our sins which inflicted wounds upon Christ on the cross *for us*, sharpens into poisonous arrows against the life of Christ *in us*. *The heart of sin is the death of Christ*: both the death which He *then* suffered, and also the death unto which He is now still crucified *afresh* (Heb. vi. 6). And to this Jesus-murder and self-murder does the devil, as being the liar, seduce men. All who make and love a lie, of them

is he the father. Wherever a lie is (and Scripture calls everything which opposes itself to the truth of God a *lie*, and not merely error, 1 John ii. 21, 27; Rom. i. 25; 2 Thess. ii. 9, 11), there we may be sure the devil is at work, often in what we call our best intentions, as was the case with Peter (Matt. xvi. 23). Whoever, then, takes up with any kind of lie, he does according to the devil's lusts, and is on the way to *will* to do the devil's lusts, like the Jews who hardened themselves against the voice of truth. But the end of this way is, that the lie, spreading like a cancer, destroys in the man all sense of truth and all thirst after it, until it becomes in truth *his own*, and thus darkens his soul into the devil's likeness, wherein there is no eye to see the light of truth and life, until at last he enters into that outer darkness and everlasting fire which is prepared, not for sinners, for they were to be redeemed, but for the devil and his angels.

We see from the following verse how far the Jews had proceeded in the destroyer's path, and with what fearful distinctness they already exhibited on themselves the devil's likeness.

Ver. 45-47. "*And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.*"

Because I.—Thus does Personal Truth place Himself in opposition to personal falsehood. *Because* Christ told them the truth, spoke to them His Father's language, for that very reason they believed Him not, because it was not the language of *their* father, the liar.

They had no ear for the truth, because there was no truth in them. It had come to such a pass with them, that they were *glad* to hear the devil's lies (Ezek. xiii. 19; chap. v. 43), and to share his hatred against the truth, against *the truth which now in Person was standing before them*. For Jesus *speaks* the truth because He *is* the Truth; He *is* that which He speaks; He is light, and He is Life. (Ver. 25). His holy personality

is the revelation of the truth. That which is given by measure to Christians as His, applies perfectly to Him (chap. vii. 18), that truth of *life* confirms truth of *doctrine*, as Gregory of Nazianzen repeats from the holy Basil: "His words wrought like thunder, because His life was the lightning thereto." Whilst His deadly enemies are looking at Him with the same indications of feeling as before, when He had cried aloud unto their conscience: "He that is without sin among you, let him . . . ,," the Lord with holy calmness utters words which none but He might say: "*Which of you convinceth Me of sin?*" Oh, what would the devil have given if one single individual amongst them could have done so! But no; he had nothing in Him; and they who hated Jesus, hated Him *without a cause*. All were dumb. A deep silence ensued, tormenting to the souls of the enemies of Jesus, a silence like that which will follow on the revelation of the Holy and Exalted One in the world otherwise so full of noise and tumult (Rev. viii. 1). Not one was found who dared to call Him a sinner, not one who might contend with Him, or accuse Him (Micah vi. 3). Behold how He reveals His glory, the Sinless among sinners, the Holy One in Israel. At length He Himself breaks the silence—"If then *I, I*, the pure and innocent One, in whose mouth is found no guile, if I say the truth, *why do ye not believe me?*" Why do ye treat me as a liar? What should, what could they answer? Again they were silent. Therefore He Himself takes up the answer—"He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

In these words, which sum up the whole preceding discourse, judgment is pronounced on their unbelief, and upon the unbelief of the whole world. Ye are not *of God*, not *from God*. If they had been God's children, they would have heard God's word in the mouth of the Son of God, they would have understood the Divine speech of Jesus Christ. The word of God only *takes hold* where it meets with something to take hold of, just as fire only burns in matter which will take fire or burn.

Now, God is willing to make all men such as His word may take hold of ; He is willing Himself to prepare the heart as touchwood to receive the kindling spark of the word, and this He does through the working of the Holy Ghost in that same word.

Let us use a simile. A piece of wood which is thoroughly wet is not at first laid hold of by the fire, but only allow it to lie on the fire a sufficient time and the fire will drive out the wet, the wood gradually becomes dry, and at length the fire catches it, and it burns. Thus is it with the heart of man. It is spoilt through and through by sin, and the word of God at first cannot get to it ; but let it only yield itself to the operation of the word, and gradually what is hostile to God is overcome, and out of the natural man a man *from God* arises, one allied to the word of God, and then he sees the word of God aright. Being drawn by God and taught of God, he also comes to God (chap. vi. 44, 45, 65 ; xviii. 37).

But he, on the contrary, who, like the Jews, allows his natural unsusceptibility for the truth to rise into devilish opposition by *consenting* not to the drawings of God, but to the devil's lusts, such an one throws into the water the wood which before was wet, so that it may become thoroughly fire-proof ; he continues godless, and grows worse and worse in his godlessness ; *he heareth not God's word, because he is not of God.*

"The wretched devil acts quite like the Turk. When the Turk has conquered a fortress or a town, he shovels the Church full of earth, brings artillery upon it, and occupies it with a strong force. In like manner, when the devil has taken possession of a man, he shovels the church of the human heart full of earth, of earthly things, such as allows God's word no way of getting in" (Arnd).

May the Lord impart to us, and may we be willing to have imparted to us, an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and as true disciples and faithful confessors of His word, let us ourselves boldly take part in His judgment upon the

unbelief of the world, and say after Him, as the holy John does, "We are of God, he that heareth God heareth us; he that is not of God, heareth not us."

Of not one sin could the Jews convince the Holy One of God; but because they were not of God, but were children of the devil, they now, instead of humbling themselves, began to revile and blaspheme Him.

Ver. 48. "*Then answered the Jews, and said unto Him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?*"

Compare chap. vii. 20. They call him a *Samaritan*, because they feel that He will not acknowledge them to be true children of Abraham, but with unbearable Samaritan-like assumption, arrogates to Himself a dignity, the notion of which the *devil* only could put into His head. The nicknames which it was customary with them to apply to Jesus, were not, they thought, without their justification. That *His* word should be *God's* word, *His* judgment *God's* judgment: this the Jews fancied must be insane assumption on His part. And it is true that, if He were not *the Son of God*, then—but hold! we will leave the inference unexpressed.

In the overflowing meekness of holy love, the Saviour answers them; and it is the image of Jesus as He here stands before us, which St. Peter has especially in view when He exhorts Christians to follow His steps. "Who did no sin neither was guile found in His mouth; who when He was reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously."

"I honour My Father—this retained in the Saviour's heart a fixt, unmoveable position, through which, whatever His solemn earnestness, He yet abode in love, and through which also whatever His love, he still abode in zeal for the truth. Oh, let us learn from the Lord Jesus to repose in the will of our heavenly Father when we are standing forth in the vindication of the Truth!" (Rieger.)

Ver. 49, 50. "*Jesus answered; I have not a devil; but I*

honour My Father and ye do dishonour Me. And I seek not Mine own glory : there is one that seeketh and judgeth."

With no *justification*, but in order to *dishonour* Him did the Jews say what they did. But it is for the Father's honour that the Saviour answers : "*I have not a devil*" (He repeats not both the approbrious epithets, but only the last, because He had already found believers amongst the Samaritans ; therefore also He shrank not upon occasion from discoursing of His own person under the figure of a Samaritan), and not for His own human honour ; for He feels this blasphemy against His human name of Jesus, as a blasphemy against *God*. "He here secretly intimates that His Father's honour and His own are one and the same thing, because He is one God with the Father" (Luther). Because He honoured His Father (and it was in fact for His Father's honour that He had just refused the character of true sonship with God to the false seed of Abraham), for that very reason it was that the children of the Devil dishonoured Him, for they are hostile to God (Rom. xv. 3). The truly humbled Jesus, whose one object in all His words and works was to seek the honour of God the Father, is the exact opposite to the Devil, who in unbelieving arrogance seeks honour for his own self, rent away from God (Matt. iv. 9); and even the holy calm, undisturbed by any breath of fleshly zeal, in which Jesus now meets the dishonour done to Him, is a fresh proof that the Devil has nothing, nothing whatever in Him.

Is it God's honour only and alone that we are concerned for, when we are reviled as Christians? If so, then how gentle, but at the same time how powerful will our self vindication be ! For then with Christ, to whom God has attached His own honour (chap v. 23), we also may add : "But there is one who seeketh (the honour of His cause), and judgeth." A day of judgment (Psalm xliii. 1) will come, when God will judge between the confessors of His Christ, and those who reject Him, and when He will redeem His threatening : "Whosoever shall not hearken

unto My words which He shall speak in My name, *I will require it of Him*" (Deut. xviii. 19).

"This is our consolation, so that we rejoice though all the world reviles and dishonours us, we are sure that God requires our honour, and for that purpose will punish, judge, and avenge : to him who can believe and patiently wait, it will surely come" (Luther). *Zechariah*, the son of *Jehoiada* fully experienced this consolation, when, dying, he cried out concerning King *Joash* : "The Lord *look* upon it and *require* it" (2 Chron. xxiv. 22). And how does God who judgeth right seek the honour of Christ ? The answer is : By this,—that He will present Him to the light of day as the only Saviour, in whose name those who keep His word have life, whilst all who despise His word abide in death. The *life* which He *gives* sets Him forth with power as the *Light* which He *is* (ver. 12).

Again resuming His discourse to those who believed on Him, but at the same time extending the arms of His mercy towards His deluded opposers, in defiance of the devil Jesus breaks out with the promise :

Ver. 51. "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*"

He who *embraces* and *keeps* Christ's word in faith, embraces and retains Christ Himself, the true Substance of His word ; and he who becomes partaker of Christ's life is passed from death unto life—*shall never see death*. Although we speak of a Christian dying, yet in truth he dies not. Though he wanders in the dark valley he fears no evil. For in the midst of death and the grave, the undying life of Christ, which dwells in His believers bodily (chap. vi. 50), preserves their eternally vitalized souls from the taste of death,* while also in the midst of the judgment of corruption, it preserves their bodies impregnated with the seed

* The Jews, indeed, afterwards substitute this expression for that of *seeing*, in order to make the alleged blasphemy of the Lord's words appear the greater ; but by doing so they do not overstep the truth ; "he who *sees* not death as a *fearful* thing, *tastes* it not also as a *bitter* thing.

of eternal life. Thus, then, is the work of him who has been the murderer from the beginning brought to an end in the case of those who keep the word of Christ, who through His sacrificial death has brought to nought him that had the power of death, and through His glorious resurrection has opened the way to the inheritance of an unfading, incorruptible, indissoluble life. "He who follows the light of life which shines from the words of Jesus, does not see death, just as one who goes to meet the sun does not see the shadows behind him" (Rieger). And this is the crown of *freedom* to which the truth, which they have known, conducts those true disciples of Christ who continue in His word (ver. 31, 32). "Christ means, that he who keeps His word shall, though in the midst of death, neither feel nor see death as He says in chap. xi. 25: '*He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*' The dying and the death of the Christian appears outwardly to be just the same as that of the wicked, but in reality there is as much difference as between heaven and hell. For the Christian does not taste or see death; he enters it meekly and silently, as if he were falling asleep and not dying. But a wicked man feels it and is even terrified at it. This difference the word of God makes. A Christian has it and holds on to it in death; therefore he does not see death, but beholds life and Christ in the word; and therefore neither does he feel death. But the wicked man has not the word; therefore he beholds no life but death only, which he then is also forced to feel; this is the bitter and everlasting death" (Luther).

Ver. 52, 53. "*Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?*"

They accuse Him of being possessed with the devil of pride. As if they had said: Shall thy word be able to do more than the word of God which Abraham our father—and we with him—

and the prophets have kept, who yet are dead? Seest thou with what an evil spirit of pride thou art possessed, that thou thus seekest thine own honour. What fine fellow dost thou mean to make thyself? Again the Lord Jesus replies with perfect meekness; His clear and holy eye is steadily fixed upon His Father, and not a speck can enter to dim its vision. The devil was to-day revenging His question: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" by one crafty attack after another upon His meekness, and at last began to threaten Him with stones:—a High Priest, well tempted and made perfect in obedience was the High Priest that we were to have.

The Lord's answer is two-fold. At first He meets the question: "*Whom makest thou thyself?*" in perfect humility, as the Son who honoured His Father, and obediently kept His Father's word; afterwards He gently lifts the curtain of the form of a servant which veiled His glory, whilst He represents Abraham as an inheritor of eternal life, who with exulting joy has sealed the truth that Christ's word delivers from death eternal.

Ver. 54-56. "*Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that He is your God: Yet ye have not known Him; but I know Him: and if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you; but I know Him and keep His saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*"

The honour and might which the Lord ascribes to Himself in the words: "If a man keep my saying he shall never taste of death," goes certainly beyond the power of Abraham and of all prophets; and if He had—as the Jews thought—come of Himself (chap. vii. 28), if He ascribed this honour to Himself as a man who had pleasure in Himself, His honour would indeed be *nothing*. But it is far otherwise. He is not *alone*, but (as He says): *I and the Father*. His honour comes from the one God to whom alone honour appertains and who alone bestows honour: it is *the Father* who has given to *the Son* the honour and glory

to have life in Himself (chap. v. 26), and to become the Light of Life for all who without Him are walking in the darkness of death. Had the Jews really known as their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whom they *called their* God (chap. v. 35), and if they had had abiding in them His written word which was committed to them (Rom. iii. 2), they would then in the incarnate Word have recognised the glory of the only begotten Son of the Father, and magnified God's truthfulness, for all His promises in Christ are yea and amen. But they knew not "*their God*;" a false, an unreal God it was whom they served; therefore neither did they know the Son, who was come unto His *own*, and His own—understood not His speech—received Him not. But yet God remained *their* God; for their unfaithfulness could not bring to nought the faith of God (Rom. iii. 3); and Christ knows *their* God, the God of the old covenant, as *His* Father who had sent Him to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and by thus sending Him had shown Himself to be Israel's God. To the same effect is the apostolic sermon in Acts iii. 13-25. Christ, therefore, in setting forth the glory which belongs to Him as the Son, for the salvation of those who are the captives of sin and death (for He told them the truth that they might be *saved*, chap. v. 34), is seeking not His own honour, but *is keeping His Father's word*. He who calls upon us to keep *His* saying is the same who keeps *His Father's* saying. If He should do what the blindness of the Jews and the devil's malice required Him to do, and disown the honour *of having God as His Father*, He would be *like unto them*, a liar: which be far from Him! No! He stands rather stedfast to this: *I know Him and keep His saying*. The holy path of perfect obedience which the Son trod, even unto death, is the seal of the intuitive certainty with which the Son also knows the Father as the ground and maintenance of His essence (chap. iv. 34; x. 18; xiv. 31). "First He says: *I know* Him, and then: *I keep* His saying. Thus it is with the Son; but with believers it is different, for *first* they keep His word, being taught by Him, and *through that* they get to know Him" (Bengel).

The honour which the Jews refused to render to the Son of God, was rendered and is rendered to Him by Abraham, "*their Father*," whose works they renounce; for Abraham *rejoiced to see the day of Christ*. "Again He shows how unlike they are to Abraham, because the very thing that gave *him* joy, to *them* was displeasing" (Chrysostom). Then, Abraham's salvation also is in Christ alone; the saying in verse 51 applies also to *him*. To the Patriarch's longing eyes the *day* seemed already present when His promised Seed of blessing should shine as the Light of the world, for the illumination of all the nations of the earth; and Isaac, the *laughter-child* of His body caused him to rejoice in hope of that true Isaac (Gen. xvii. 17), in whom God would bring a blessed *laughing* to all mankind. There upon Mount Moriah, when he received back his son alive whom he was about to offer as a sacrifice, and in his stead offered up the ram,—then did his enraptured spirit desery the Lamb of God, the only Son, whom God did not spare, but gave Him up for us all. Holding fast the word of promise and comforting himself therewith (Heb. xi. 11), he did not see eternal death; though dead, ye yet lives. For when the angels sounded their symphony, their "Glory to God in the highest!" and when on earth, around Bethlehem, where the glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds, there began to be a stirring of great joy, then a brighter light began to shine, and a joyous agitation began to stir in the abode of all the spirits who had been saved by hope; for the day that they longed for poured its joyful lustre into the twilight of their existence, and the father of the faithful in whose bosom his true children waited for the day of Christ, even Abraham, *saw Him and was glad*. If Moses and Elias conversed with the Lord Jesus, and if the splendour of His glory shone upon them (Matt. xvii.); how should an Abraham *not* have seen what it was vouchsafed to them to see?

If the Jews had really received what *the Scripture* testifies concerning their father Abraham, and what the Lord lays before them in proof of His honour as the Christ, then would they

with the eyes of an Abraham have been able to behold Him in His real character. But even in full daylight they saw not Christ, because they did not "rejoice to see" Him. The blinding of their eyes (Is. vi. 10) through Christ's word which they would not believe, was becoming more and more complete (Matt. xiii. 14).

Ver. 57, 58. "*Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.*"

Abraham waited for the day of Christ, and that day appeared when the Word became flesh, and as the promised Seed of Abraham dwelt amongst us full of grace and truth; but before the Word *became* flesh, ay, before Abraham came into being to long for the incarnation of the Word, the uncreated, eternal Word *was*,—even He at whose feet lie not only eighteen hundred years, but all created time, during all which while He says: "I AM"—that is, from everlasting to everlasting (Is. xliii. 13). There never *was* a time when He was *not*: quite right was the Church in rejecting the Arian doctrine. I am eternally, Jesus Christ says. Because, then, He is the eternal Word and the personal eternal Life manifest in the flesh, because in Him the eternal Godhead has taken to itself our perishable humanity, and indissolubly united it with itself, making one "*I am*"—therefore He can truly give us eternal life, and yea and amen shall abide His promise: "*If a man keep My saying, he shall never taste of death.*" In faith in this promise the clear declaration of Christ's eternal existence confirms and strengthens all those who "understand His speech," in whom "His word finds a place," and who continue therein. But they who are not of God rise up in revolt against a saying through which God shines so powerfully into their darkness, and the lusts of their father, the devil, they will do.

Ver. 59. "*Then took they up stones to cast at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.*"

Compare chapter vii. 44, and Luke iv. 30. As their hands on a former occasion were not allowed to lay hold of Him, so now their eyes were holden that they no longer saw Him. *Going through the midst of them*, He at the same time *hid* Himself, miraculously withdrew Himself, from their sight (comp. Jer. xxxvi. 26). "The invisible Godhead covered and overshadowed His holy body, and escaped out of their hands; this also is a part of His glory, out of which His Godhead shone. And as the Lord here hides Himself, and escapes out of their hands, so will He also privily hide in His tabernacle His own from the provoking of all men, and under the shadow of His wings shall be their refuge until the tyranny be overpast" (Arnd). This was for those who believed in Him a confirmation of their faith; from *them* He did not hide Himself, *they* saw His glory.

Jesus and the Man Born Blind.

CHAPTER IX.

Lord Jesus, give me, I beseech thee, sound eyes, eyes which can see; do thou touch mine eyes, even mine ! Amen.

THE history of the ninth chapter is a sermon in act and deed preached on the subject of the preceding discourse: "*I am the Light of the world*," to which in fact the Lord expressly refers in verse 5.

The Jews (we here see), estranged as they are from God, understand not the speech of the Son of God; they struggle to the extent of their power against recognising His *works* to be God's works; and in contrast to the man born blind who was gaining his sight, they, concurring in the devil's lusts, of set purpose close their eyes to the revelation of the glory of the Son of God; they become doubly blind, whilst the Gentiles hasten to Siloam's opened fountain and receive their sight (ver. 39). While, then, the Jews are confident that they themselves are guides of the blind, lights to them which are in darkness, we behold standing over against them Jesus the true Light, the true Guide of the blind, and the *good Shepherd* of His sheep. Thus the intermediate history recounted in the ninth chapter, linking to each other the discourses contained in the eighth and tenth chapters, bind all together as in one unbroken chain.

Ver. 1. "*And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.*"

The Lord Jesus was on His way out of the temple where he had *hidden* Himself from the Jews. With holy calmness He walks forth from the place (comp. Acts iii. 2). There He saw, not far from the temple, a poor unfortunate, who must needs be sitting just there and just then, in order that the works of God, which in the temple had been just now withdrawn from the Jews, might in him be made *manifest*.

If these Jews, who, imagining themselves to be enlightened, would not receive the light and therefore remained in darkness, form a representation of the Jewish nation in general, then also, the man born blind will furnish a representation of "Galilee of the *nations*,"—even of that people which have walked in darkness, but now have seen a great light (Is. ix. 1, 2.)

Ver. 2. "*And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*"

The disciples, we may believe, had seen this poor blind beggar (ver. 8) as they had been going towards the temple at various times before, but on the present occasion, Jesus, looking upon the blind man with the eyes of a Saviour's benignity, put it into the minds of His disciples to ask Him to solve what must needs seem to them a difficult problem. For whence came this man's blindness? If he had been thus afflicted for a certain number of years past only, like that sick man at Bethesda, in that case he might have had to seek the cause of his blindness in his sin, especially in the sins of the eye, for "wherewith a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished" (Wisd. xi. 6), but he was *born* blind. No doubt God saw before hand his course of life, and, it might be, purposed by native blindness to chasten and subdue the sinful lusts which were in his heart; or, again, it might be that, in this child born blind, God intended to visit the sin of his parents.

The view on which the disciples found their question is certainly Scriptural—*all suffering is punishment*. There were no suffering in the world if there were in it no sin to be punished. This man who is born blind would not have been so unless he

had been born of sinful parents, and himself sinful. In this the disciples are right. But they are wrong in just the same way as Job's friends of old were wrong, in imagining that this man or his parents were greater sinners or more guilty *than others*, and that his blindness was an especial punishment of some especial guilt (Luke xiii. 2, 4 ; Acts xxviii. 4). Much rather ought the sight of this poor sufferer to have raised in their minds some such thought as this : " It is of God's mercy that *we* also were not born blind, for we were born sinners as truly as this man was."

The Redeemer saw another *especial* reason for the misery of this blind man.

Ver. 3. "*Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents : but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*"

This man has not sinned *more* than others who can see, and his parents have not sinned *more* than others who have children who can see. But he was born blind in order *that the works of God might be made manifest in him*, the works of tender love which God works in Christ. When he came out of his mother's womb, and was surrounded by the bitter lamentations of his friends bewailing the insensibility of his visual organs, even there the wisdom of eternal Love exulted with joy, for thus had He ordained it, in order that this blind man might be a witness of the glory of God, and that in him Christ might prove Himself the light of the world.

There lies in these words of Christ strong consolation for all sufferers. And although thy suffering, thy blindness, and all thy weakness, will never depart from thee but with thy bodily life, yet be certain of this, that thou sufferest thus *in order that the works of God may be made manifest in thee*—manifest in thy inward life, when thou endurest suffering with a Christian's patience ; manifest at the last before all God's elect in heaven, when thou shalt receive the crown of life as one that hath overcome. Wherever suffering exists, there the works of God will fain be

made manifest, and as with this blind man, Divine penal justice appears entirely absorbed in Divine compassion, so it behoves us to see in every sufferer an instance of the working of this compassion, and give ourselves up as assistants to God's labour of love.

Ver. 4, 5. "*I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day : the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*"

The emphasis rests on the word *I*. To work the works of God now to be made manifest in this blind man, such was the end for which the Father, who had been working hitherto, had sent the Son (Chap. v. 19). And the Son who does what the Father does, *must* work the works of the Father, as surely as He is the Son. Therefore to *Him* were the steps of the blind man directed. In those blind eyes He recognised a task properly His own, and without waiting for the poor man to beg, He proceeded immediately with the revelation of His glory in him. For already the *day* was drawing to a close, at which Abraham and all Abraham's true children rejoiced—the day of salvation—the day which was vouchsafed to the world in the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh, in order that all who allowed His light to shine on them might see His glory. This *day* lasted just so long as the Light, the Sun of that day, was, *as the Light of the world*, still *in the world*. When the Light went away and was no more in the world, then came the *night**—that night by whose earthly image Golgotha and the whole land was for the space of three hours invested. It is true that the inextinguishable Light of Life has broken through the night of death, and has made to rise upon His Church a glorious unclouded day, the day of the New Tes-

* In the Church militant, day and night follow one another, times of prosperity, illuminated by the gracious presence of the Lord, and times of wickedness, when the light of grace withdraws from before the almost universal darkness. Therefore it is that pious souls sigh for the manifestation of the New Jerusalem, one of whose glories being, that *there is no night there*.

tament (Rom. xiii. 12 ; 2 Cor. vi. 2) ; but yet His work of redemption, in which He finished the work for which He had been sent by His Father, came to an end when He cried, "*It is finished.*" Therefore He here compares Himself to an industrious and faithful labourer, who sees himself nearly approaching the end of his day's work, and is desirous of neglecting no part of his task before the night comes, *when no man can work* (See Prov. ix. 11).

This same watchword of the Lord applies also to us in reference to the day which we enjoy in possessing the light of the Gospel (1 John ii. 8). There are days and nights for the Church also ; it is not in every time alike that successful attacks can be made upon the prince of this world. Well for the labourers who work while the sun is in the heaven ! Christ hastens on with quick and still quicker steps in the path of blessing, in which He works with His servants, and confirms their words with signs accompanying ; and it is plainly to be discerned in the present aspect of the Church, that the Lord governs her according to the motto, "*I must work while it is day.*"

Therefore let us also, so long as it is day, and while we are "lights" of heaven's own illumination "in the world," be still doing our own proper work (Phil. ii. 15). The city which is set on the hill must never be hid. "All the children of Israel had light in their dwellings ;" let us see to it that *that* be true of the dwellings of the true Israel, that our light may shine brightly into the darkness of the Egyptian world.

As being the Light did the Lord now pour His lustre into the misery of the blind man. He felt that He must do it ; He *could* not leave it undone, for even for *him* was He made and sent to be the light both of soul and body.

Ver. 6, 7. "*When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.*"

To blind Bartimeus, who in faith cried to Him for help, He said: "Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole," and immediately he received his sight (Mark x. 52). But the faith of this blind man is not so quickly and strongly developed as the faith of Bartimeus. Therefore the Saviour first draws out his faith by laying the healing power, dwelling in Him, in an outward means and in a visible sign, and then He prescribes to the man whom His power has touched, a journey of faith, as Elijah once did to Naaman. The means—clay on the ground and spittle—was indeed to the eye of reason an undignified and even an absurd means; it brought at first to the blind man only a feeling of his blindness; "but we dare not wish to prescribe to the Lord the means by which He shall heal us, but must conformably submit ourselves to His treatment; and if we do this, we shall at last by experience know that the means which to our flesh went most against the grain, was the very means which worked the most healing results" (Lyser). What *He* extends to us is eye-salve, even though it be clay!

To the holy John there appears a mystery couched in the name of the pool of *Siloam*. *Siloam* means *Sent*. The hill of Zion sent forth the gently flowing waters of Siloam, a figure of the house of David, which once was as much despised by a people who held flesh its arm (Isa. viii. 6), as now the *Sent* One of the Father was,—He who had at once come forth from the light of eternal glory and from the house of David,—and who was as Israel's true well of salvation, as the cleansing fountain opened to the house of David (Zech. xiii. 1), as the Siloam, full of grace and truth, was dwelling in silent, concealed glory in the midst of the wretched and suffering. If the blind man had too much despised the waters of Siloam to wash in them at the command of Jesus, he would have hindered the manifestation of God's work in him; but *he went his way and washed and came seeing*.* The healing name of the water, which is

* "These few words," says Lyser, "have a more glorious meaning than those renowned ones of the great Julius Cæsar: *Veni, vidi, vici*."

also the name of Christ, came forth in his case into mighty operation, the works of Him who had sent His Son being wrought in him.

The Zion of the New Testament has also a healing water of *Siloam*, lightly esteemed in the eyes of flesh and of reason, but precious to us who believe: the washing of water in the word, when the Holy Ghost, *sent* by the Father and the Son, is shed upon us, that we may be cleansed and renewed so as to see the kingdom of God. Whenever the Church lays her hands of blessing upon a *candidate for baptism*, and then leads him, touched by the power of the Triune God, to the holy font, then the healing of this man who was born blind is after a spiritual manner repeated: as we read, "he went his way and washed and came seeing."

With the circumstantial accuracy of love, the evangelist in the following verses describes how this work of God, performed on the blind man, was made *manifest* in all Jerusalem,—how this glorious beaming forth of the Light of the world sought to penetrate into any chinks which there yet might be in dark hearts around, while it was yet day,—and how, on the other hand, obstinate and most culpable unbelief made the Jews incapable alike of perception and of impression towards that saving work which during that day was being wrought. Brenz says: "This miracle is recorded in this manner that we may see the several gradations by which it became more and more manifest. The works of God are in such wise done that their manifestation serves at once to strengthen the faith of believers and to be a stumbling-block to unbelievers. So here, the miracle was first made known to the neighbours, in order that the pious among them might thereby be drawn to believe; and then the report spread about till it reached the ears of the Pharisees; but they, like Pharaoh, were only hardened thereby in their unbelief."

Ver. 8-12. "*The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and*

begged? Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he. Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight. Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not."

Not a single circumstance that occurred to this blind man from the moment that "a man" called Jesus touched his eyes, up to the time that he worshipped that "man" as the Son of God, could ever be blotted out from his recollection. Perhaps it was from his own lips that John himself learnt how he had been exercised in the school of Christian confession. We see in him a beautiful type of that blessed *simplicity* which belongs to grace where it has been truly received, and which therein abides safe, as in a fortress, against all the contradictions of the enemy; he is a beautiful type likewise of that *faithfulness* to which it will be given to have abundance, because it honours and guards the firstling gifts of grace which it has received, and from the *gift*, allows itself to be drawn upwards to the *Giver*.

A *work of God* has been wrought in him; of *that* the now seeing blind man is sure; and that his physician is from God he knows certainly. But yet he leaves the work to speak itself to praise its Master. The language of this work those understand who, like this healed man, rejoiced in the work itself, and who desired a Saviour who can make the blind to see: to such prepared souls as these, the story which the once blind man had to tell would prove a powerful sermon. May the Lord grant that among ourselves like witnesses to His glory may at all times be found, whose *story* may edify the Church; ay, and may we ourselves give a practical proof in our life that we have come from Siloam seeing! And if at any time we meet one of our former worldly acquaintance whom we can hardly recognise, because from blind he has become seeing, from old has become new, there the account of the work of God which has been made

manifest in him cannot fail to be as a draught of pure water, refreshing to our souls.

The neighbours were anxious to know *where* the man was who had wrought the miracle, and in their simplicity (just like the man healed at Bethesda), supposing that the rulers would take a joyful interest in this marvellous story, they led the man for examination before the Jewish tribunal (the so-called Sabbath assembly held in the forecourt of the temple).

Ver. 13-16. "*They brought to the Pharisees him that afore-time was blind. (And it was the Sabbath-day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.) Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath-day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.*"

He put clay upon mine eyes, nothing more; that poor medicine was all that it cost Him to give me the faculty of sight! *He*, that is, *Jesus*. So soon again have the Pharisees to deal with Jesus! Yes, the Light of the world was again pursuing these darkness-loving men. Hardly had they, only yesterday, got away from Him, when, behold! He was again to-day shining into their reluctant eyes afresh with inexorable brightness. And, in fact, their consciences are stirred as they behold this living, undeniable work of God before their eyes; but they quickly stifle the rising voice: "This Jesus is *of God*," in their Sabbath-idol; and as in their midst, Nicodemus voices are a second time heard, so that there is again repeated that *division* (chap. vii. 43) which in this world is always the consequence of newly kindling truth, they turn again in a kind of bewilderment to the blind man, as if expecting from him a refutation of the opinion which their fellow-rulers had expressed in favour of Jesus as the Christ.

Ver. 17. "*They say unto the blind man again, What sayest*

thou of Him, that He hath opened thine eyes ? He said, He is a prophet."

Glad would they have been if the man before them had remained as blind in the eyes of his mind as they were themselves. But he had gone on from seeing to seeing. From faith in the wonder-working *Prophet*, this apt scholar of grace at last arrives at faith in the *Son of God* (ver. 35), and by the same road along which before him the Samaritan woman had been led. But the Pharisees *will* not believe, because it is Jesus, the Saviour of sinners, to whom they are called in faith to surrender themselves. With precisely the same mind, that enemy of God, *Voltaire*, once said: "If in the market of Paris, before the eyes of a thousand men, and before my own eyes, a miracle should be performed, I would much rather disbelieve the two thousand eyes and my own two, than believe it." So here, these men, fleeing as they do from the light and choosing the darkness, take up the matter over again, in the hope of being able to detect some traces of fraud.

Ver. 18-23. "*But the Jews did not believe concerning Him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind ? how then doth he now see ? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind : but by what means he now seeth we know not ; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not : he is of age ; ask him ; he shall speak for himself. These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews : for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that He was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age ; ask him."*

The manner in which a miracle is here investigated is unique in its kind. A learned vindicator of the "credibility" of the Gospel history (Tholuck) draws attention to the consideration, how this narrative does not decline to meet even the wishes of those who deal so strictly with it as to require judges who

should examine according to set rules of evidence, concerning the facts reported to them. But indeed we see here plainly enough that no judicial proceeding, however strictly and closely followed up, is in a condition to prohibit unbelief or to constrain faith. The Jews opposed the *no* of their perverse will to the clear *Yes* of the manifest work of God, and came not to the light which they hated. In just the same way did they afterwards behave in opposition to the restored lame man in Acts iii. and iv. Only he that is of God, heareth God's word; so also, only he that is of God, seeth God's works.

The parents of the blind man, from fear of being put out of the synagogue, would not tell the name of Him who had dealt so kindly with them in their child: but yet they did not wish that their son should not tell what he knew. On the contrary, a son who loved the "Prophet" more than honour with men, evidently gave them pleasure. Are there not even now parents who wish their children to be pious and to confess Christ, whilst they themselves have not sufficient decision of mind to break with the world and to count banishment from it to be honour with God?

Ver. 24. "*Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.*"

When He had loudly challenged them to convince Him, if they could, of sin, they were all silent; but now they *know* that He is a sinner and no prophet! To this they intended the healed man to give his assent, and this the hypocrites called: giving glory to *God*, though all the while they sought *their own* glory, and were trying all they could to rob the Son of God of the glory which in this man He had garnered up for Himself. Whoever held Jesus to be a prophet (such was their meaning), or, above all, to be Christ, deprived the God of Israel of His glory: from this heavy sin the man must cleanse himself; to *their* authority, and through that, to God, he must give glory. But the man was not to be moved either by threats or dissimulation to speak against Jesus.

Polycarp, a pupil of the holy John, when in extreme old age, was about to be led to the stake; and when his heathen persecutors called out to him: "Blaspheme Christ or die," the martyr answered: "Six and eighty years have I served Him, and He never did me any wrong; how then can I now blaspheme my King who saved me?" The blazing fire had its prey, and by his death he glorified God.

Ver. 25. "*He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not; one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.*"

Thus in affecting simplicity he really does "give God the glory." What the Pharisees profess to "know" does not for one instant disturb him in the "one thing" which *he* "knows;" and this "one thing" inspires him likewise with a holy aversion to repeat after the accusers of his Physician the name of "sinner" which they had applied to Him; although he does not as yet know that "this man who is called Jesus" is, amongst all mankind, the only one not a sinner.

There is much in the things of God which thou knowest not now,—which thou shalt only know hereafter,—only perhaps in heaven. Let not that distress thee. If thou only knowest one thing, that thou wast blind and dead in sins, and art now enlightened by Christ and alive in Him,—that old things are passed away, behold! all things are become new: if thou knowest this, be of good heart; against the arrogant "*we know*," with which the devil, the world, and reason, will seek to throw suspicion on thy comfort, arm thyself with the sure shield of experience in faith, "*One thing I know!*" The holy Paul exhorts his beloved Timothy to keep that which is committed to his trust, "avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called, which some professing, have erred concerning the faith:" well then, let us faithfully keep that which is committed to us against the falsely renowned wisdom of the world, which pretends to know that the Christian's faith is foolish and vain; and let us

faithfully “keep that which is committed to our trust;” and let the strain of our confession always be based upon this key-note: “*One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.*” The devil may talk to us as much as he pleases about “self-delusion” and “vain fancies;” he may give the lie if he will to the feeling which we have in our hearts; yet there is one thing which he can never take from us: *the Siloam-washing of our baptism*,—he never can argue us out of *that*. Concerning that we may ever afresh tell: “*I went and washed, and I received sight,*” and, with old Prætorius, extol holy baptism, “the devil’s hell, the Christian’s heaven,” as he calls it, and say: “Oh, thou noble water of heaven, thou blessed water, thou water of life, since we knew thy power from the Gospel, thou hast made us alive in Christ. Before that time, I knew not that I was saved; but now Christ has told me so through the Gospel, therefore I am now alive in Christ. Before that time I was dead in sins, but now I live in the righteousness of Christ. Before that time I was dead in death, but now I live in life. But the devil will not, if he can manage it, let us know that. For whoever knows this truly and understands it well, that man has won the game, and is released from the devil. Therefore ought we ever to preach of thee, thou holy and saving baptism, in the family, in the school, in the church. He who preaches thee, preaches the Gospel. Therefore, blessed baptism, we will ever thank God for thee; in thee we will continually wash our souls, through Christian repentance, from our daily sins, for besides thee, there is no other washing for us. In thee may we silence our uneasy consciences; with thee we may drive away the Devil. With thee we should rise in the morning; with thee, we should go to rest. In thee we should sing; in thee we should exult; in thee we should laugh; in thee we should be merry when all the world is sad. In thee we should fall asleep and die. O thou highly-prized baptism, how can I sufficiently magnify and praise thee? Thou art far too high for me, I cannot attain unto thee.”

Ver. 26. "*Then said they to him again, What did He to thee? how opened He thine eyes?*"

They hope to hunt out of him some little word or other which shall contradict his first account. This at last provokes the hitherto patient man, and, indignant at their dishonesty, which he clearly saw through :

Ver. 27. "*He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be His disciples?*"

Then he was indeed himself become the disciple of Jesus ! Not only have his bodily eyes received their sight, but the Light of the world had also sent His illuminating rays into the recesses of his soul, and by this light he was able to see the darkness within which the Pharisees were obstinately entrenching themselves; the stiff-necked enmity which would not allow them to hear and receive so clear a witness as his own was. The sharp arrow of scorn which was contained in his question concerning their discipleship, struck the sore place in their conscience, and their pent up fury broke forth, first discharging itself upon Jesus.

Ver. 28, 29. "*Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art His disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence He is.*"

Their *reviling* is, in the sight of God, absolute *blessing*. Well for us when the Pharisaical world reviles us with being *Jesus' disciples* ! They themselves are minded to be *Moses' disciples*, but their boasting is vain. If the fact that God spoke with Moses, and what He spoke with him had really entered into their hearts, they would on bended knees have thanked God that He not only had spoken with Moses, saying, "Go and witness against them, for they are a stiff-necked people," but also had spoken with His dear Son : "Go, my Son, and take upon Thee the children (Heb. ii. 14, 16) whom I have given over to chastisement and wrath." But they believed not Moses who accused them, and in consequence they did not believe Christ

who came to call sinners to repentance, nor knew from whence He was—viz., that He was from God, who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son. And because they knew it not, they deemed it insufferable presumption that this “fool” should pretend to know it. Observe with what a chilling contemptuousness, “*this fellow*,” they designate the Prophet whom Moses had promised them! His light they still for a while have with them, but since they thus treated Him, the hour will come when He will go away from them.

Ver. 30-33. “*The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence He is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, He could do nothing.*”

This unheard-of miracle, that he was blind and now saw, caused the man less astonishment than that those who saw were blind to the work of God which had been made manifest in him. But alas, this “marvellous thing” is seen afresh every time that a spiritually blind man is enlightened to see the kingdom of God! They who feel not the blindness which they *have*, who rather look scornfully at the sight which they have *not*,—these know not from whence the Physician is who opens the eyes of those who are blind in sin and death, and deem God’s work of illumination to eternal life as mere phantasy and moonshine. Verily, it is a marvellous thing, and not the proper course of things, that God’s mighty works of healing are hid from so many eyes: it is a marvel of satanic depth, as the apostle Paul says: The God of this world hath *blinded* the minds of them which believe not.

The Pharisees knew not that Jesus was *of God*, and the healed man in his simplicity did. It was this that excited his wonder. He could not make out the wisdom of these learned men to whom what was so clear to him yet remained hidden.

From whence should this Jesus be except from God? If the Pharisees knew that *Moses* is of God, because God had authenticated his mission through signs and wonders, why should they shut their eyes and ears against the *work of God* which bore witness for Jesus? “*We know that God heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth.*” Such is the proposition, agreeable to the Scriptures, and put forth in the name of all who know the Scriptures, with which he steps forward as a teacher of the blind; and with this proposition he refutes their charge that Jesus is a sinner. (Job xxvii. 9; Ps. lxvi. 18; Prov. xv. 29; Isa. lix. 2.)

It is a consoling truth, that it is not every man's prayer that is heard; if one offereth not the “sacrifice of righteousness,” *his* trust in the Lord is vain (Ps. iv. 6). If it were otherwise, *they* would have long ago won the game who say, “Come and let us cut them off from being a nation;” and “the name” of the Lutheran Church, as the real “people's Church,” would by this time “be no more in remembrance.” Therefore, the man whose supplication God hears, has the seal that he is doing God's will. As yet the healed man knew not of the union as between Father and Son which existed between God and Jesus; but he is now standing on the very threshold of this knowledge when he extols Jesus as a petitioner at the footstool of God, even that Jesus whom God at all times hears, because He always asks according to the will of God.

Ver. 34. “*They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.*”

There they speak like genuine Pharisees as they are. The man born blind was now seeing—that they cannot deny; but they forthwith declare him (see ver. 2), without any further question, marked out a sinner by God, *altogether* struck with blindness, even in the eyes of his understanding; and as they unfortunately cannot make him blind again in body (for “the

eyes of them that see shall not be dim”), they are determined at least to brand upon him the mark of “a spiritually blind sinner,” and they cast him out from their “holy” communion. Thus their very rage ends in stamping a seal upon the miracle, to decree which out of existence all their force was unavailing. In turn for this, they relieve themselves of the presence of the healed man, on whom a miracle which to them was so fatal had been wrought.

Ver. 35. “*Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*”

The Pharisees cast him out, Christ received him; for the “tabernacle” which he had lost, he was indemnified by the altar of the true tabernacle—Jesus *found* him (Heb. xiii. 10). “When a man has received a blow which, on the one hand, causes him sorrow, but on the other hand, suddenly sets him free from all hurtful regard for man, and from the hope of worldly happiness—then is the right time for seeking him out, in order to win him into the kingdom of Christ completely.”—Rieger. When the world casts thee out and rejects thee, because thou art not ashamed to confess Jesus as thy Saviour before those who, in their pride, feel no want of a Saviour, then in return Jesus is not ashamed of thee; with love He seeks thee; as the good Shepherd He goes out after thee; and when He finds thee, He rewards thy faithfulness with new and blessed views into His grace and truth.” “*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*” Dost thou feel it no grief to believe on one whom the world hates, and to be put under a ban? Whilst the Lord thus questions the man who, on His account, had been cast out, He at the same time kindly extends to him His hand, in order to lead him forth from faith on the *Prophet from God* into faith on the *Son of God* (compare the leading of Nicodemus, chap. iii. 2, 13, 16); or we may also express it thus: in order to draw forth the hidden kernel of belief on the Son of God out of the shell of belief on the man from God. And the

Friend of souls succeeds in His wish. Eagerly does the questioned man grasp at the high and holy name, *the Son of God*; and as before, the salvation-coveting woman of Samaria had done (chap. iv. 25), so now *his* spirit also hastens, already believing and worshipping, to the Son of God, even while he is yet asking after Him.

Ver. 36. "*He answered and said: Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him.*"

As if he said: "Yes, there is a voice in me which says: I believe on the Son of God! O Lord, who is He? Him to whom my soul is saying: I believe that *Thou* art He I long to see. Thou, Lord, knowest who it is; Thy word will I trust; shew me, then, the Son of God!" And the Lord's condescending love inclines to his desire.

Ver. 37. "*And Jesus said unto him: Thou hast both seen Him, and it is he that talketh with thee.*"

Thou hast seen Him; thy desire has been already satisfied; with the eyes which I have opened for thee thou hast *seen* Him, and *it is he that talketh with thee*: if thou desirest to believe on Him, then believe my *word* that I am He. Thus, while the *work* of Jesus shewed to him the Son of God, the *word* of Jesus also testified to him concerning the Son of God.

Wherever a soul is honestly seeking after the Lord and after peace in Him, a like blessed hour is at hand for it too, in which His gracious presence will be revealed to it, and when the story will be: "*It is even He that talketh with thee.*" The word which He speaks is His abode; and whoever receives His word has by faith seen Him (chap. viii. 25). For we, verily, are not worse off than this believer was, who with new eyes saw in Jesus the Son of God; for we have this same word which he trusted in; and if only this same yearning of faith with which He heard the voice of the Son of God and opened the door to Him, possesses us in searching the Scriptures and in hearing the preached word, we shall not fail to receive the same blessed revelation: "*It is even he that talketh with thee*;" neither will there be wanting

to the Lord those who shall be followers of this worshipping confessor.

Ver. 38. "*And he said: Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.*"

Now was completely accomplished in this man the revelation of the works of God. Previously he had seen the Son of God without knowing Him; but now he saw His glory. His eyes had been doubly opened, and the humble form of Jesus was no longer any hindrance to his *worshipping* as the Son of God Him whom all the angels of God worship. He *believed* and he *worshipped*. The living breath of faith is prayer; it is the believer's proper sign of life, as the cry is of the newly-born infant.

As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world; with these words addressed to His disciples had the Lord approached the blind man. Now he beheld Him altogether illuminated in body and soul, become a child of light. But in His Saviour's heart, joy on account of this one man who now walked in the light, was joined with sadness on account of the many who loved darkness rather than light.

Turning to His disciples in particular, He now expresses what is stirring in His heart:

Ver. 39. "*And Jesus said: For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind.*"

It was not to surprise the disciples, that the Light of *this* light-needing *world* did not enlighten the eyes of all to see His glory, as it did both the bodily and the spiritual eyes of this blind man; for *judgment* the Light shines in the world (chap. iii. 19). The result of its coming into the world is, that in its lustre the *blind* who long through this light to see, and the *seeing* who with imaginary eyes already see without this light, are distinguished the one from the other. Poor sinners who bitterly feel their native blindness,—these become seeing in the sweet light of Jesus' grace, seeing (Isa. xxxv. 5); but the proud, self-right-

teous saints who say in their blindness: "*We see, we know*" (Rom. ii. 18, etc.), who feel no want of Jesus' light, they *remain* blind, and *become* more blind; their blindness is made manifest in the light shining upon them; and through their *love* of darkness they fall under the condemnation of incurable blindness. Saul, on the road to Damascus, illustrates this passage in a very lively manner: he is struck blind by the heavenly lustre of Jesus; he is blind although he seems to see (Acts ix. 8); but when with anguish he recognises in this bodily blindness his condition of spiritual blindness, and at length begins to pray, then he becomes seeing both in body and in spirit.

The Lord briefly calls those who fancy they see, *seeing*, as if quoting their own words with reference to themselves; just as in Luke v. 31, 32, He says: "They that are *whole* need not a physician, but they that are *sick*; I am not come to call the *righteous*, but *sinners* to repentance." "The brightness of the physical sun serves to enlighten only those whose eyes are sound, whilst those whose eyes are weak are only blinded thereby; but it is not thus with the Sun of eternal life: He enlightens the blind, and strikes with blindness those who see; He saves the sinner, and condemns the righteous; He kills those who live, and brings to life the dead; He exalts the lowly, and humbles the proud" (Brenz).

Vers. 40, 41. "*And some of the Pharisees which were with Him heard these words, and said unto Him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth.*"

If instead of *asking* in the offended pride of pharisaical and official arrogance: "*Are we blind also? Are we not to see except through thy help?*"—if instead of that, they had confessed and lamented their blindness, then they also would have been of the number of those happy blind ones, who through Jesus become endued with light. Yes, if they had humbly confessed: "*We are blind,*" this original *sin* of blindness would have been immediately taken away, for His grace, powerful to give a second

birth, transforms sinners, blind from the womb, into enlightened children of God. But they confessed not: "We are blind," but said: "*We see*;" they called their darkness light, and their error truth. Therefore their sin remained, unpardoned and unpardonable, incurred and incurable, forasmuch as upon unbelievers the wrath of God abides unalterably. That was Israel's misfortune, that she was wise in her own eyes, and pure and holy in her own sight; and that to the Saviour who came unto His own and knocked at the gate, she said: "I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?" (Cant. v. 3), as if she had no need of *that* washing of the feet without which a Peter even has no part with Him.

"Oh, that all who think they see and who imagine themselves wise and prudent, might be really aroused, and would cry unto God that He would vouchsafe to show them their blindness, and make them see that a mere formal confession of faith and knowledge of the letter is not all that they need. But there is great comfort, on the other hand, for those who confess from their hearts that they are blind, and who would gladly see, who would gladly submit to be truly enlightened and brought to believe; they shall surely see, for therefore has Christ come into the world. They shall surely be brought to believe, and thus have no sin which shall be imputed to them. Viewed aright, this is really a word of encouragement: *If ye were blind, ye had not had sin.*" (Bogatzky.)

The Door and the Shepherd.

CHAPTER X. 1-21.

O Lord Jesus, the good Shepherd of the sheep, grant to us that we, as the sheep of Thy hand, may hear Thy voice, and following Thee, may find abundant pasture, which Thou suppliest. Hear us, O Lord, we humbly beseech Thee. Amen.

It must have been with a rejoicing spirit, that the lately healed blind man listened to the discourse of the Saviour which next follows in the Gospel ; he at any rate would not fail to understand what things those were which Jesus spake to the Pharisees (ver. 6).

For he himself was such a sheep as had both, on the one hand, experienced the killing and destroying of the bad shepherds, and on the other, the faithful and gracious tending of the Good Shepherd. That which *Luther* says of the sheep, that "most simple of all animals," exactly applies to him, he says : "Yet the sheep is superior to all other animals in this, he soon hears his shepherd's voice, and will follow no other than him ; he is clever enough to hang entirely on his shepherd, and to seek help from him alone ; he cannot help himself, nor find pasture for himself, nor heal himself, nor guard against wolves, but depends wholly and solely upon the help of another." While we are listening to this discourse of the Lord, we must in imagination see standing before the eyes of the false shepherds, as a living interpretation of the parable, this poor creature in particular, this sheep, who, as we have seen, is hearing *His* voice, and is fleeing from the voice of *strangers*.

How fervently did the Good Shepherd rejoice over this good sheep! He sees in it the first fruits of that flock which was to find in Him life and perfect satisfaction; and it is out of the abundance of His heart that He now discourses as He does concerning this love, even to death, for the sheep which the Father has given Him. It is as Luthardt says concerning this discourse: "We feel the heart of Jesus beating here."

Ver. 1. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that enters not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."*

In order to understand the simile, we must picture to ourselves the peculiar way in which Eastern Shepherds used to manage their flocks. For example, in the evening they gathered the flock together in a wide open place, which was fenced round with a low stone wall. (This open place is here called a sheep-fold.) At the door of this fold an armed servant, called the porter (ver. 3), kept watch throughout the night, who only admitted the true shepherd of the sheep; if any came for plunder they must *climb up* some other way. Towards morning the shepherd came; the porter opened to him the entrance; and going in he called the one sheep which the rest were wont to follow, by name; this sheep would know his shepherd's voice; and thus, together with him, the whole flock followed their shepherd walking before, out into the plain. The Pharisaical rulers certainly in the sheep-fold of Israel, (Ezek. xxxiv. 14), which was hedged round by the law, bore the name of shepherds; but the Lord denies that they entered in by the door. Their entrance into the sheep-fold was not by fair and honest means. For if they had been shepherds after God's own heart, if they had come to God's flock in God's name, they would have known the Son of God, the promised Christ, to be *the Door* through which from time to time all the true Shepherds of Israel have gone in and out: for it is Christ who authorizes and gives power to all the Shepherds who may have led, or who ever will lead the people which is saved through

Him to the sweet pastures of life. But here the Pharisaical shepherds were blind to the glory of the Son of God, and scorned *first* to come to Him (ver. 8), and *then* (like Peter) to feed His sheep. Instead of entering in through the door, they had climbed up some other way ; therefore they were not true shepherds, but *thieves* and *murderers* : *thieves* who, instead of feeding the flock, fed themselves (Ezek. xxxiv. 8), who sought *their own* honour and not God's, and thought of their own miserable gains, instead of the people's welfare, and thus robbed God in the flock of His inheritance ; *murderers* they were too, who instead of leading the sheep to life in the pastures of Divine grace and truth, destroyed them with the poisonous weeds of their human inventions and lies (Jere. xxiii. 1) ; ay, and thrust out of the sheep-fold all those who were *true* sheep, such as, for example, the man born blind. He who desires to enter in by the door, must make his word and preaching go out from Christ, and flow back to Christ.

But where there are any who climb up some other way, who make a door of their own doing, a hole of their own, they are thieves. The gospel is so delicate and noble, it can endure no addition or joint doctrine.

If only there is but *one* side road set up, then thereby my soul is torn from God ; and therefore, then, I must perish, this path then is my murder and death, for the conscience and heart of a man must stand upon one single word alone, else it cannot be sustained. Now, these thieves and robbers form at all times the great majority in the world, and nothing better can they be as long as they are not in Christ ; in fact the world *will have* such wolf's-preachings, and indeed deserves no better, because it hears not Christ, nor regards Christ. It is no wonder, then, that true Christians and true Pastors are so few, and that the numbers of the false Church are so much larger, when both the teachers and the taught lead each other astray, that they may add drunkenness to thirst (Deut. xxix. 19). But to the true Church, on the other hand, Christ gives this comfort, that His

sheep are afraid of them, and do not listen to them, neither follow them." (Luther.) In contrast with men really thieves and murderers, but wearing the disguise of shepherds, the Lord now sets forth the image of faithful shepherds.

Ver. 2-5. "*But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.*"

There is no doubt that in the background of this picture of good shepherds, we may distinguish already the original pattern of them all, *the Good Shepherd Himself, Jesus Christ*; but it is not until ver. 11 that his pastoral character comes forward into clear view. Until then, He sets Himself forth as that which He *also* is, and by which He essentially distinguishes Himself from all human shepherds, viz, as *the Door* to the sheep. Whilst the shepherds whom He has under Him, are also His *sheep* as much as any in the flock, He, the Chief Shepherd, is also *the Door* to the sheep, through which good shepherds enter into the fold. We may not, therefore, confine the interpretation of the above verses absolutely and exclusively to the Shepherd Christ; but we must apply them immediately, and in the first place, to *christian shepherds*; else we perplex the meaning of the holy words, and narrow the richness of their contents.

To Him who as a shepherd of the right sort enters in by the door, *the porter opens*. Who is the porter? Who is it that guards the door of the Church of Christ, and protects her from the inroads of strange and false teaching? Who is it, again, that opens the door of her heart, that she may receive the word of truth falling from the mouth of true shepherds? It is *God the Holy Spirit*, He is the porter. When I preach the pure word of God, and it finds an entrance into the hearts of my hearers, the Holy Spirit it is who opens hearts to my preaching

(Col. iv. 3 ; Acts xvi. 14, with xiv. 27), and bears witness that the same Spirit (in the preached word), is the Truth (1 John v. 6). In their work of converting and preserving souls,—of feeding souls, faithful shepherds and preachers have for their partner and fellow-labourer the Holy Ghost Himself. Those, then, who are really sheep, *hear* and *know* the voice of the shepherd whom the porter has admitted ; and they *follow* Him, when he *calls* them by *name* ; for he calls them in order to *lead* them *out*—all without exception,—himself *going before* them to where they shall find pasture ; and the sheep are said to be the shepherd's *own*, they belong to him by virtue of their dependence upon him, and he to them by virtue of his office. What the shepherd Moses once implored of God, when he said : “ Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation which may *go in before them*, and *which may lead them out*, and *which may bring them in* ; that the congregation of the Lord be not as a sheep which have no shepherd” (Numb. xxvii. 16, 17),—this we hear again from the mouth of the Shepherd Christ. The *hearing*, the *knowing*, the *following* of the sheep, is, on the other hand, a seal for the shepherds, shewing that he is a true shepherd of true sheep, and not a stranger ; for *a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him : for they know not the voice of strangers*. This is a beautiful and clear mirror, wherein christian shepherds and christian flocks would do well to view themselves. Just as the good Shepherd Christ knows His sheep (ver. 14, 27), and as He calls them each one by name (comp. Gen. xxxiii. 17 ; Isaiah xliii. 1), so also, according to the measure which they have received, do the shepherds who come in Christ's name, and are appointed by the Holy Spirit (Acts xx. 28), know the sheep which are entrusted to them, and so also their watchfulness extends to each individual sheep in particular, with a distinguishing care for souls. And as the good Shepherd Christ leads His sheep, going before them in the way which they are to follow Him (chap. xiii. 15 ; 1 Peter ii. 21), so do Christian shepherds lead the flock of

Christ to true pastures, whilst they—as examples to the flock (1 Peter v. 3),—themselves walk in the way to that life to which their preaching calls ; as the Apostle Paul, like a true shepherd says : “ Brethren, be *followers* together of me, and mark them which walk, so as ye have us for an *ensample*” (Phil. iii. 17). But in fact, Christ’s true sheep recognize in the voice and example of Christian shepherds, the voice and example of Christ Himself, and this is the reason why they are so ready to follow them (Heb. xiii. 7 and 8 ; comp. with ver. 7). If we wish to know where it is that *the* good Shepherd, “whom our soul loves, maketh his flock to rest at noon,” we may learn beside the shepherds’ tents, “by going our way forth by the footsteps of the flock ;” for these have ever hearkened to the genuine shepherd’s voice (Song of Sol. i. 7, 8). “After the manner of sheep, they have sharp ears, they are quick in recognizing their shepherd’s voice, readily distinguishing it from all others ; and thus they are not easily deceived by any who pretend to be shepherds and are not.” (Luther.) A *stranger*, who does not bring to them the well known voice of Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit in the word, they will not follow, but will *flee* from Him. Mark well ! they *flee* from Him. They will not say : “It is enough if only we do *not follow* this strange preacher, this spirit of error, in those points in which he holds forth false and strange teaching.” They will not say this, but they will have nothing at all to do with him ; they will not receive him as a shepherd ; they will *flee* from him as from a contagious disease (as St. Paul recommends Timothy in reference to such men, whose “word will eat as doth a canker,” to shun “them, and to cleanse himself from them” 2 Tim. ii. 17, &c). This little word “*flee*” brings comfort to us poor Lutherans, when our *flight* is brought up against us. The Union has changed the words of Christ into these opposite words : “A stranger will they *also* follow, and will *not* flee from him, for they know not which is the true Christian’s voice, and which is the strange voice.” Here in ver. 5 we see *our* flight described, not in ver. 13. With purposed

tautology the Lord says at the end : they know not the voice of *strangers*.

He always speaks of true Christian shepherds as of *one* ; for however many they may be, their voice is but one voice ; but “a stranger,” has not one and the same voice with other strangers. Truth is only one, the name of error is Legion.

Ver. 6. “*This parable spake Jesus unto them : but they understood not what things they were which He spake unto them.*”

And yet the blind man who had received his sight stood there as a living interpretation of the parable ; yes, there he was, accusing them—even *them*—as the “strangers” whose hypocritical voice (chap. ix. 24) *he* had not known, and from whom he had fled, taking refuge with Christ the good Shepherd ; for when Christ had called him by name, he at once answered : “Lord, I believe,” and had worshipped Him (chap. ix. 38). But that the Lord speaks to them in parables which they *understand not* is a judgment upon them (Matt. xiii. 12-15). This judgment was the proper sequel to what we find recorded in the eighth chapter.

Ver. 7-10. “*Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily I say unto you : I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers : but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door : by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.*”

Again does the glorious : “*I am He,*” (chap. viii) sound, both in the ear of the displeased Pharisees and in that of the delighted disciples. The Door of the sheep is Jesus Christ, and He alone ; ever since there has been a flock of God on earth to be fed He was the Door of the sheep, and the Door of the sheep He will continue to be, until through the ministry of His servants, the last lost sheep shall have been gathered into His fold.

All who have entered, or who will ever enter in to the sheep in any other way but *through* Him ; all who come to the sheep *before* Him, before the living ever acting Door, instead of coming

through the Door, and who therefore climb up some other way (ver. 1); are *thieves and robbers* (comp. Jer. xxiii. 1). The Lord does not mean to cast any reflections here upon the Holy Prophets of the Old Testament; for though they came to Israel previously to the appearing of the Word in the flesh, yet they had not passed *before* the Door; for to them the Holy Spirit had opened the door of the Christ, though as yet only looked forward to. Like Jeremiah, they were shepherds following after the Lord (chap. xvii. 16). As Augustine says: "Moses and the prophets came not so much *before* Him as *with* Him, because they had no desire *arrogantly* to precede Him, but they meekly bore Him before them as Him through whom they spake."

But the Pharisees, who would not deign to come to Christ as the Son of God, and who, as Christ-less shepherds, took upon themselves to feed the people, thus contemptuously disregarding the one only Door to the sheep (chap. ix. 24), *they* rather it is, and those like them, who are called by the fearful name: "*thieves and robbers.*" Let John the Baptist make this expression clear to us. He, indeed, came before Christ, but nevertheless he did not take precedency of Him (chap. i. 15, 27), but paid honour to Him as His superior, bore Him before himself as the living Door *through* which he himself had entered testifying to Israel, and for himself was resolved to be nothing, and to reckon as nothing. Here, then, let every pastor examine himself whether he is come to the Church of God *before* the Door, that is Christ, or whether he is come *through* the Door; for it is a fearful thing to despise the Door of the Kingdom of Heaven, and yet to covet the office to which is given the key of the Kingdom of Heaven (Luke xi. 52). "*I am the Door,*" the Lord again repeats, that we may give good heed to the statement,—then, for the encouragement of those shepherds who enter in *through* Him, He adds that they shall not enter in in vain, whether for themselves or for the sheep which are committed to them, but that they shall *be saved themselves*, and likewise *save others*. Blessed are the shepherds who live themselves from

the same pastures, to which in the name of Christ they guide the sheep ; blessed are they who as sheep *go in and out*, through the same Door through which, as shepherds, they *lead* the sheep *in and out* ! Christ's sheep delight in finding *pasture* only with those shepherds who find pasture for Christ with themselves,—with those who in the preaching of wholesome truths, not only save their hearers but *themselves* also (1 Tim. iv. 16). And *such* shepherds the sheep likewise *hear*, but thieves and robbers they will *not* hear. The sheep never heard them, the Lord says. From Abel down to this true sheep of the house of Israel, this blind man, every one who at any time was of God, and therefore heard God's word, has refused to hearken to the voice of *Christless, Godless* shepherds ; for he has known that whoever does not bring Christ to poor sinners, robs them of their life, as a *thief* and a *murderer*, ay, even as *the* thief who from the beginning, in paradise, has only come that he may do the exact contrary to shepherd's work, namely, that he may *steal* and *kill* and *destroy*.

As the Lord contemplated this destroyer and murderer of life, His, our, and His sheep's enemy, the Devil, whose lust all evil shepherds will do, His heartfelt compassion is excited, and His tender love to the poor, threatened flock bursts forth with all the energy of a pent up river. His kindness is not satisfied by calling Himself *the Door* to the sheep, through which the good shepherds enter ; *He Himself* is also the real *Shepherd*, even *the* good Shepherd, who gives life in abundance to the sheep of His flock.

Ver. 10. "*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly,*" ("and that they might have full satisfaction." Luther.)

The thief steals, the shepherd gives ; the thief comes on his own account, to satisfy himself at the expense of the sheep (Ezek. xxxiv. 2, 3), the shepherd comes for the sheep, to satiate them with His own life which He has given for them. In *Him* have we *Life*, and in this *Life full satisfaction*, "riches of grace,"

a measure pressed down, and renewing ever from the fulness of His grace and truth (chap. i. 16: Eph. i. 7, 8, 19). "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

Ver. 11, 12, 13. "*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.*"

The good Shepherd of whom Scripture prophesies is now come (Ezek. xxxiv. esp. v. 2, 3: xxxvii. 24: Isaiah xl. 2), and His goodness, His real shepherd's heart, is perfected in the self-sacrificing love which makes *Him give His life for the sheep.*

Here the incomparable love of Jesus goes far, far beyond the comparison under which it is represented. The earthly type cannot embrace the riches of the heavenly archetype. For though in defence of their flock, shepherds may fight with beasts of prey (1 Sam. xvii. 35; Amos iii. 12), yet it never is their *intention* to substitute their life for the life of the sheep; the distance of nature which separates them is too great for that. But though the distance in nature is great between the *great* Shepherd (Heb. xiii. 20) and us: between Him, the Holy Son of God, and us, the sinful children of men, yet it is not so great but that He was willing (ver. 18) to give up His life for us. In order to give His life an offering for sin (Isaiah liii. 10), He, the almighty Shepherd, who "dwelleth between the cherubims," has appeared in the flesh, and in the pains and infirmities of His erring sheep has become Himself a sharer. As God's shepherd, who is at the same time the Son of God, did He allow Himself to be smitten by the sword of death (Zech. xiii. 7), that by the ransom of His own sacrificed life He might destroy the power of death over the flock of slaughter (Zech. xi); and being Himself "brought again from the dead," through the blood of an everlasting covenant, He has brought His redeemed flock with Him, as a Prince of Life, as a Captain of salvation, into the pasture

of His Glory (Heb. xiii. 20 ; ii. 9, 10). By this shepherd's love, which is beyond all reach of our reason, we live ; this it is that brings us full satisfaction and exceeding riches of good. The secret of this shepherd's love has its clear expression in this, that the sheep are the shepherd's *own*. By the contrast with the hireling the *shepherd* comes out into clearer light. The *hireling*, who is hired to tend the sheep for pay, naturally cares more for his own life than for the life of the sheep who are not his own. Therefore he takes care of them, it is true, so long as there is no danger at hand, but when he sees the *wolf* coming, he *leaves* the sheep and *flees* ; for he *cares* not for the sheep, who are *caught* by the wolf and *scattered*. Now who is *the hireling* ? In *one* sense, indeed, there is but one shepherd, and all others who are called shepherds are only the hirelings of this shepherd ; for only to one shepherd, Christ, do the sheep belong, being His property by the twofold right of creation and redemption ; even to St. Peter the Lord does not say : "Feed *thy* sheep," but "feed *My* sheep" (John xxi. 16). But the name : *hireling*, cannot have this meaning here, for, on the contrary, the good Shepherd, Christ, makes a point of sharing this precious title of Shepherd with all Christian shepherds, who through Him, in His name, and by the Holy Spirit's guidance, enter into His Church ; and therefore in the following verses He uses the same language in speaking of Himself as He employs in ver. 4, when speaking of those who are shepherds of the sheep, because they enter in by the Door. Although Christian shepherds do not, *like the* good Shepherd, give their life for the sheep, to effect their redemption, which has been wrought : and with the preaching of the gospel as ambassadors in Christ's stead they, constrained by the love of Christ whose own the sheep are, throw themselves in the teeth of the hellish wolf whom they see coming to catch and scatter the sheep, and defeat his assaults. They care well for the sheep, for instead of living *on* the flock as hirelings, they live *for* the flock as shepherds. They are minded not only to tend the flock in peaceful days and in quiet times,

but to stand fast by it in the hour of temptation, and not to leave it or flee from it ; for the love wherewith Christ has first loved them, and which He has made them the instruments of communicating to others, does not allow them to see one sheep of Christ *caught* by the enemy,—made away with by the ensnarements of sin and shame,—or the flock *scattered*,—parted asunder by perverted doctrine and perverted conversation,—without heartfelt pity, or without affording in the power of the divine word and of prayer, strenuous help in withstanding the danger. No, no ! shepherds who tend Christ's own flock, having for their watchword : “The lambs I want not for myself, but, Lamb of God, for Thee alone !”—they are never hirelings who flee when the wolf cometh, but in answer to all human thoughts which would fain make them soft and weak and faint-hearted, they say with St. Paul : “What mean ye to weep and to break my heart ; for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts xxi. 13 ; comp. xx. 21).

Who then is *the hireling* to whom the Lord contrasts Himself as the Good Shepherd ? It must be one who because the sheep are not his own *has no power* to make a stand against the approaching wolf and protect the sheep. “The hireling fleeth *because he is an hireling*,” the Lord says ; he cannot do otherwise, for he is no shepherd at all, but an hireling ; the fleeing is here not a shepherd's misconduct, but a hireling's natural property : it is not amongst the thieves and murderers who are in the service of the wolf, that arch-thief and arch-murderer, that we are to search for the hireling.

The greater part of the Pharisees, it is true, were such thieves and murderers, yet they were *not all* of them so ; a Gamaliel, for example, had it not in view to kill and steal and destroy ; on the contrary, he really desired, according to the best of his power, to feed the flock as Moses' true disciple. But the law *could* (Rom. viii. 3) not tear sinners from the jaws of death. When the wolf comes, that is, when the devil, who has the power of death, enforces his right over the sinner, then help

can never come by works of law, they never can protect him, then even God's most faithful hireling, Moses, must flee, yea even though he would fain give his life for the sheep (Exod. xxxii. 32), for it would cost more than that to redeem them (Psa. xlix. 9), and he would only perish with them. *Luther* hits the mark when he says: "The *hireling* only knows how to preach the ten commandments, and to tell that men must do good works. But such teaching can no longer comfort or sustain when the devil comes, for he cares nothing about any works or duties or life of ours; but where he does not find Christ, there he has won the game, and goes on tearing and devouring souls at his own will and pleasure, without let or hindrance; yea, such teachers and masters cannot even help themselves, but are chased and driven away along with the sheep, so that they have no power to rally, and at last become themselves the prey of the enemy if they do not learn of some other succour." Therefore also Moses learnt and taught of other succour, for he wrote of Christ (chap. v. 46); and Gamaliel's great pupil, Paul, thoroughly experienced what the hireling could and could not do, and he ran into the arms of the good Shepherd, that he might become a sheep of His pasture, and a shepherd of His sheep. The Lord will make known the way which Paul trod to all who are honest hirelings ("but they are *few*," says *Luther*, "as few with us now-a-days, as amongst the Jews of old"). And may He help all who through His grace are shepherds and not hirelings, that they may be found faithful when the time comes for encountering the wolf! Nothing is more deplorable than to see shepherds demeaning themselves as if they were not shepherds, and instead of putting on the might of the Good Shepherd to meet the wolf's attack, sinking back into the weakness and faint-heartedness of the hireling. God be praised that we have one Shepherd who is faithful! And let us observe with what gentle words He draws us to His shepherd's staff.

Ver. 14, 15. "*I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.*"

How can the good Shepherd help caring for His sheep, when He *knows them* to be *His* own? They bear the seal: "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. ii. 19). The holy mark: "*Jesus' property*" is stamped upon them. That which makes His sheep known to Him, and makes Him known to His sheep, is the word which they *hear* and which He speaks (and which, in fact, He Himself is, chap. viii. 25); this precious knowing and being known belongs therefore to *faith*. "The Lord my Shepherd knows that I am His,"—this is a strong consolation and a sure anchor of the soul; for His is not a mere idle knowledge of us, but it is a powerful and living knowledge,—a flowing forth of His almighty love. He knows me in grace and mercy as His property, and He calls me by name in a spirit of personal and intimate friendship. He knows me even when I cannot know myself (1 John iii. 20), and my yet unutterable sighs by Him are well understood—

"Known unto Him is all, that e'er can thee befall;
Thine ev'ry fear and sigh, He knoweth from on high;
The hot tears as they run, He counts them every one.
Rest thee content!"

And because in grace He knows us as His, so we in faith know Him as ours (Gal. iv. 9), as our Good Shepherd. "*I am known of mine.*" There is a mutual drawing of knowledge between the Shepherd and the sheep. He lovingly insinuates His knowledge into our hearts, and makes us blessed by our communion with His blessed life. For not as one afar off do we know Him, but as our Life, as Him who makes us sharers in His life by His own gracious indwelling in us. Indeed, the communion between Him and His, has its holy archetype in the eternal communion between the Father and the Son: "*As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father.*" As is the mutual knowledge in love which exists between the person of the Father and the person of the Son, united as those holy persons are by unity of substance, such is also the mutual knowledge in love between Christ and His Church (comp. chap. xiv. 20; xv. 10; xvii. 8, 21). Oh, what true and certain knowledge is this!

And yet truly it is a knowledge which is hidden from the world. The Father knows the Son, veiled under the lowliest form of a servant,—knows Him even on the cross as His beloved Son: and so likewise the Good Shepherd knows His sheep as His own in the midst of their grief and misery, in their weakness and sinfulness, ay, and even in the jaws of death; and they in turn know Him, just as He Himself, when walking in the valley of the shadow of death, still knew His Father. Truly it is a marvellous knowledge!

This passage is a strong rebuke to all those doubters who in voluntary humility refuse to be sure of their salvation; and it ought powerfully to incite us to strive after such a knowledge of Christ as our Good Shepherd and Saviour, as it is the desire of His love to grant us,—a knowledge such as is expressed in the loving words: “My beloved is mine, and I am His” (Cant. ii. 16). “To that the soul anchors,” says the pious Anthony, “she is not satisfied until she knows that Christ is attached to her, and she to Christ; she presses on towards the attainment of this *mutuum consortium* (mutual fellowship).” This with pious souls is their hunger, their thirst, their longing; and whenever they feel doubt and hesitation on this point, then all is awry and ajar with them. Whilst they think they are not certain of it, oh, then they feel as if they were hanging in air. But where this is the case, it is itself a sign that such a union between Christ and the soul has already taken place. For if the soul did not already hang upon its Shepherd, it would not be moaning and complaining as it does; and in good time comfort will follow: “I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord.”

“*And I lay down my life for the sheep;*” and, therefore, because with the love wherewith His Father knows Him He knows those whom His Father has given Him, *therefore He lays down His life for the sheep.* And, on the other hand, it is in this greatest love of all, through which He laid down His life for them (chap. xv. 13) that the sheep know Him as the Good Shepherd.

Until we know by faith that He has laid down His life for us whom His love calls *friends*, while we were yet *enemies* (Rom. v. 10), until then His shepherd's heart has not really been made known to us; for all His shepherd's virtues have at once their root and their consummation in this single one: "*And I lay down my life for the sheep.*" I lay it down, He says—He began to give up His life when He first took upon Him this poor flesh of ours (Heb. ii. 14). It is amongst the Jews who were seeking to kill Him and even now tormenting Him by their unbelief that He speaks these words. In fact, His whole path upon earth was a path of sacrifice. "Christ's whole life in the days of His flesh was a journeying to death." (Bengel.) Having then before His all-seeing eye those whom His love knows as His own,—those who being reconciled through His death are saved through His life, and whom He contemplates as sheep belonging to one and the same flock, and as forming one perfected whole (chap. vi. 37), the Good Shepherd thus continues:

Ver. 16. "*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*"

Let none despise the little company of His own who know Him! The disciples, the man born blind, and any other whose eyes He had opened to see His glory, and their ears to hear His voice,—why, it was but a little flock in all out of the lost sheep of the house of Israel which was gathered around Him; the greater part by far could not understand His shepherd's speech (chap. viii. 43). Yet never mind! Not only does He already know as His own the many thousand Jews (Acts xxi. 20), sheep of this *fold*, whom He knew as about to believe on him, but He *has also other sheep which are not of this fold*, in fact not folded at all, viz: *the children of God who are scattered abroad* in the heathen world (chap. xi. 52). He *has* them; they are already *His*; for He knows that the Father has given them to Him, that they might have power to become the *children of God* through faith in His name. In like manner the Lord said to

St. Paul at Corinth : “ I have much people in this city (Acts xviii. 10). They are as yet *scattered abroad*, but—“ *them also I must bring*,” the Good Shepherd says. Again this precious, gracious *must*, of most free love ! Comp. chap. ix. 4 : Luke xix. 5, and xxiv. 26. He *must*, because it is the Father’s will, who has given both the sheep to the Shepherd and the Shepherd to the sheep (chap. vi. 39). He *must*, because it is within His soul a most pressing want of redeeming and saving love. He *must bring* them—*gather* them *together*, ‘as St. John explains the Lord’s word in chap. xi. 52 ; those who are scattered abroad He must gather together, both to each other, and also to the sheep of Israel’s fold, to make of both one (Eph. ii. 14). And whereby does He bring about and accomplish this *must* of His love ? How does He “bring” the sheep ? By *His voice* ; “ *And they shall hear My voice*.” No other means, neither worldly power, nor human wisdom, can bring to pass this yearning desire of the Good Shepherd, this holy purpose of His love, but it is to be wrought by *His voice* alone. Where the sound of His voice is, there is He ; there He is leading the sheep ; there the bridal chariot is prepared, in which the heavenly King Solomon fetches the daughters of Jerusalem to be his crown and the gladness of his heart (Cant. iii. 9, &c). He that heareth *you* heareth *me*, He says to His apostles : by the *apostolic word*, as His voice, the flock of Jesus Christ has been gathered together, and by the same word it will be gathered until the fulness of the heathen shall have come in, and the now shepherdless flock of Israel shall be brought back again. And this unmistakable soul-penetrating Voice the sheep shall *hear*, and they who hear it shall live and be saved (chap. v. 25) in the pastures of the Good Shepherd,—“ *and there shall be, (literally : be made), one fold and one Shepherd*.” As there *is* one Shepherd, so shall it *be made* one fold. To *one fold* will the Good Shepherd bring all the sheep, and the whole fold will hear the *one Shepherd* as *its own* Shepherd, according to Ezekiel’s prophecy (chap. xxxiv. 23 ; xxxvii. 24). This precious promise is in steady process of

being fulfilled, and cannot be hindered ; it will have got its perfect consummation when the voice of the Good Shepherd shall have brought in that last individual sheep whose believing hearing has beforehand been determined in the counsels of Eternal Love. Just so long will the world continue, on *that* day its time will have expired, when the one flock shall stand complete before the one Shepherd. On the feast of Pentecost began in power this glorious *one fold, one Shepherd*, and as the apostolical voice of Pentecost has never since died away, so the one holy apostolical Church has never ceased to pray : “Come, Holy Ghost, and fill the hearts of Thy faithful people, and kindle in them the fire of Thy divine love, Thou who through diversity of tongues hast gathered together into *oneness of faith*, the nations of the whole earth.”

To our impatience, indeed, the process of the realisation of the word of promise, *one fold, one Shepherd*, often seems to last too long ; and the apparently poor success of missions amongst heathens and Jews, but, above all, the divisions of those who call themselves by the name of Christ, the ever-increasing confusion of tongues amongst those who are baptised into one body, everything running into confusion, nobody understanding his fellow,—all this tempts men to desire by their own hands to bring about the unity of those who are scattered abroad, not *by* the voice of the good Shepherd, but *without* it, in *opposition* to it. Missions have been conducted with fire and sword ; and instead of being gently drawn with the sweet accents of the Gospel, they have been driven by an arm of flesh into the Church’s fold, so that the Church itself has been corrupted into a mere worldly institution. Men have devised an union which aims at setting up one church without unity of doctrine, one body without one spirit, one flock without one shepherd’s voice recognised by them all. But the Porter, the Holy Ghost, does not open the door to these works of man’s artifice and man’s power. The voice of Christ, the good Shepherd—this it is that must bring back and gather together

from their dispersion these sheep who are going astray and returning every one to his own way,—and the voice of Christ by itself and alone. Neither medicine nor plaster is of any use here, but *the word* alone, the word of the *Lord*, which is the only heal-all, which alone can heal the wounds of His body, rent as it is asunder. Let us therefore possess our souls in patience; and as the eyes of servants look unto the hands of their masters, so we must fix our gaze *on the Lord our God*, until *He* have mercy upon us, until His living word of power: “*I, even I, must bring them!*” appear on the scene in answer to our earnest prayer: “Lord, we pray Thee, shortly to gather together in one the sheep of Thy fold and the number of Thy children, that they no longer be so distracted amongst themselves in this vale of tears. It is surely enough that they are so often scattered hither and thither by this world. Why should they be divided amongst themselves?” And when the cruel wolf, by his attempts to scatter, fills us with alarm, and tempts us to hireling’s thoughts, then does the blessed assurance: *There shall be one fold and one Shepherd*, give us a glimpse into the fields of the heavenly Zion, where the Good Shepherd feeds His sheep brought home from all dispersion, and leads them to living fountains of water. We shall see it, this heavenly Jerusalem, and our heart shall rejoice with unspeakable joy: *One fold, one Shepherd!* The Lord God it is who says it, and He will also do it; His tarrying is a hastening, and at even time it shall be morning; and the Lord shall be King over all the earth; and in that day there shall be one Lord, and His name One (Zech. xiv. 7, 9).

The voice which we hear now, and which will accomplish this miraculous work of uniting all the sheep in one flock, is the voice of the Son of God, of Him who was *dead* and is *risen*. Only when the love of the Good Shepherd in laying down His life, and His majesty in taking it again, have been displayed in power, will He draw all men unto Himself (chap. xii. 32); and it is only the peace obtained through His blood which shall become the bond of peace to His whole flock (Eph. ii. 13, &c). *That* it is to which the next verse refers.

Ver. 17, 18. "*Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*"

The flock given to Christ as His own is here represented as the *reward* of His sacrifice for it, just as in Isaiah liii. 11, 12; comp. also: "*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him,*" in Phil. ii. 9. Because the Son faithfully performs the office of the Good Shepherd, obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; *therefore* the Father loves Him,*—*loves*, whilst He spares not His own, but gives Him up for us all, even unto the pains of death and condemnation (Rom. viii. 32). And the Son, confident of this encircling love of the Father which never leaves Him alone, lays down His life in order that He may *take it again*,—that through His victorious life He may overcome and bring to nought death, both for His own human nature and for the human nature likewise of those who belong to Him (Heb. ii. 14.) The Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep; but the sheep are not thereby deprived of their Shepherd; on the contrary, it is there that their joy in Him begins; for He takes His life again in order to make it the life of His people.

No man, neither Caiaphas nor Pilate, neither the world nor the prince of this world, *takes His life from Him*. Jesus succumbs not against His will to an overpowering violence when He lays down His life; but He lays it down *of Himself*. In the will of His own love lies the *power* of surrendering His life, which else was not subject to death,—of not resisting the enemy of life (James v. 6); and He exercises this power of dying because it is bound up with the other power, that of overcoming

* What could be more humble than these words? *On our account* does the Son wish to be loved by the Father, viz., because He died for us. How then? Was He not loved before? Did the Father *then* first begin to love Him, and is it *we* who have occasioned Him this love? Behold and see how He condescends to us!—*Chrysostom*.

death through His glorious resurrection (chap. iii. 19.) For believers in the Son of God, it is not His power *to rise again* that is the marvel; it was indeed *impossible* that He should be holden of death; but His power *to die*, the power of the Shepherd's love by which He let Himself down *so* deep in the likeness of poor sinful flesh, that death dared to come nigh Him,—it is this that must needs constrain us to an adoring astonishment which never can cease. This gracious: “*I have power*,” where-with the Lord of glory goes towards death, is brought before our view in the history of His passion continually; we see it from the time of His being taken prisoner in the garden of Gethsemane, when His word of power sets His disciples free, whilst He delivers Himself over to the terrified men who were come to apprehend Him,—up to the time of His last word of power on the cross, where He surrenders His life into the hand of His father.

Finely has Hilary remarked: “The God-man suffered *by virtue of His will to suffer*. By virtue of that same will, in which He emptied Himself, did He for us lay Himself open to the attacks of hostile powers and of death, in order to conquer them; and His suffering is a continuous acting of His highest freedom,—at the same time a continuous triumph.”

But in exercising this twofold power of dying and living again, the Son is not doing His own will as separated from the Divine will, but He is doing the will of His Father who sent Him to be a Propitiation; His sacrifice when offered is truly availing and truly sealed by God's amen of complacency, as it is a sacrifice originally desired by the Father and offered by the Son in a spirit of obedience to the Divine will: “*This commandment have I received of My Father*.” We may then indeed trust the Good Shepherd: He has received His ordination from the Father,—“for Him hath God the Father sealed.”

The commandment which the Son of God received from the Father to lay down His life that He might take it again, is delivered likewise in their measure, to all the brethren of the Only-

Begotten, to all the children of God; and with the commandment is given also the *power* to perform it. True Christians have power to lay down their life (Mark viii. 35), as those who with Christ are crucified, in order that they may take it again, as those who with Christ are quickened (Gal. ii. 20; Eph. ii. 5). The darling lust of our old man, the life which of all is most our own,—we have power to lay it down. And that which is here spiritually commenced in the power thus possessed by the Christian, will one day have also its bodily consummation in the resurrection of the flesh at the second coming of the Lord.

Ver. 19-21. "*There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye Him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?*"

Again, as in chapter vii. 43, and ix. 16, the multitude was divided; the sheep who heard the Shepherd's voice separated themselves from those who, because they were not sheep of the Good Shepherd, knew it not and heard it not. The *union* of all in one, promised in ver. 16, can only be brought about by a process of *sundering*. The same voice which unites, sunders likewise; the truth, which includes in one pale all who obey it, also *excludes* all who resist it. Without that "exclusiveness," which is so much reproached by a falsely extolled charity, the one fold can neither be maintained nor be brought into existence.

The enemies of the Good Shepherd who would not hear in Him the voice of the Son of God, nor believe in Him, recurred afresh to the old reproach: "*He hath a devil and is mad;*" but those on whom the Porter had begun His saving work, could not be thus diverted from listening to the Shepherd's voice; they directed their gaze, first on the man born blind and then again on the Lord Jesus,

"Who doth with *word*, by power Divine,
Deed instantaneously combine;"

and whilst thus, on the one hand, the verse of the Psalmist finds echo in their spirit: "The *Lord* openeth the eyes of the blind," so on the other, they revolve His consolatory words in their hearts, opened wide to receive them, because they feel them to be the words of the Lord; yes, they join themselves to this blind man, in order that they also themselves^d may see. because it was manifest to them that the glory of the Son of God was beaming upon them.

Jesus at the Feast of the Dedication.

CHAPTER X. 22-42.

O Lord Jesus, again we pray that we may hear Thy voice and know Thy works, and thus may see Thy glory, a glory as of the only-begotten Son of the Father. Amen.

FOR yet a little while was the Good Shepherd amongst the lost sheep of the house of Israel, to seek them and to gather them that they might be saved. The night was soon coming of which He spoke in chap. ix. 4; and therefore, as a last effort of His love as the Light of the world, He would fain shine in that spot where the darkness opposed to Him the most obstinate resistance. He had left Galilee, whither He had returned after the feast of tabernacles, and had betaken Himself to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and at the *feast of the dedication* He entered into the city.

Oh Christ, of light almighty King!
Thou seest us to Thy glory blind:
Lighten our eyes! in mercy bring
Us to Thy fold, true life to find!

This prayer the Lord was seeking to awaken and to hear, while He again mixed amongst a people who celebrated the feasts of the temple and yet rejected the Lord of the temple. In this discourse which we shall to-day consider, we still catch the tones of the Shepherd's voice; He sharpens, it is true, the sting which His former discourse left behind in the "thieves and murderers; but at the same time He strengthens and more firmly establishes the consolation which "His own" derive from

His words, for He describes the name and dignity of the *Good Shepherd* as being the name and dignity of the *Son of God*, and reveals the glory which He possesses in the character of Shepherd as being the glory of the Son by unity of essence united to the eternal Father. For what good thing can be wanting whilst our Shepherd has at His command all the treasures of God? The clear key-note of our Gospel: "Very God of very God," meets our ear in this section also with remarkable distinctness.

Ver. 22, 23. "*And it was at Jerusalem, the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch.*"

The feast of the *dedication of the temple* was celebrated for eight days, in memory of the reconsecration of the temple in the time of the Maccabees, after its desecration by Antiochas Epiphanes (1 Macc. iv. 52-59). More shockingly than Antiochas had the Jews themselves laid waste the holy place when they made it a den of murderers; but that did not disturb them in their festal rejoicing; and the thousands of lights which burnt during these eight days could only serve to make more glaring the pharisaical darkness in which they were themselves enwrapped. Oh, that they had allowed themselves to be illuminated by the true light whose brilliant lustre was even now filling the temple!

Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch,—in that same place where we afterwards find the apostles Peter and John (Acts iii. 11). It was fitting that the Son of David, the eternal Solomon, should in Solomon's porch, the only ruin left of Solomon's building, be encircled by those who went about to "destroy this temple"—this temple wherein alone is the "settled place for God to abide in for ever" (1 Kings viii. 13).

"*And it was winter*"—winter without, winter in the hearts of the Jews; "the winter," alas! was not "past" with *them* (Cant. ii. 11). Compare the similar: "And it was night," in chap. xiii. 30. And what follows is altogether "winterly."

Ver. 24. "*Then came the Jews round about Him, and said unto Him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.*"

This question of the Jews who surrounded Him is the answer to His *silence*, or rather to the silent sermon preached to them by His *walk in Solomon's porch*, for the "stones should have spoken to them." They think to cast off the guilt of their Christlessness, which inwardly vexed them, and throw it upon the silent Jesus; but it is shameful hypocrisy their saying: "*How long dost thou make us to doubt?*" (or as the words properly mean: "How long dost thou fill us with expectations which at last must prove vain?") Understood it they had long ago that Jesus spoke of Himself as *Christ*, but they wished to persuade themselves that He had not said so *plainly* "I am Christ," as that they should thereupon give in their adhesion to Him as such. And it was certainly true; the preaching of the Galilean Prophet directed the Jews not to look for a Christ such as their hearts were lusting after. The Lord knows the thought of their heart; but His sympathy with the *misery* of their unbelief softens His anger against their *wickedness* in resisting the truth; and therefore with the accent of grief more than of rebuke, He breaks His silence and answers:

Ver. 25, 26. "*Jesus answered them: I told you—we see there He tells them plainly!—and ye believe not; the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep as I said unto you.*"

To souls who were willing to believe, Jesus had often, even lately, in His discourse concerning the Shepherd, said clearly and pointedly who He was; but the Jews, who were hankering after a worldly Messiah, did not "understand the speech" in which, as Christ, He discoursed to them; and the *works* through which the Father testified of the Son they despised. The restored blind man walked among them as a living sermon on the Christ, but *they believed not*, for they loved darkness rather than the light which in Christ offered to enlighten them. Ye

believe not! the Lord says; *yours* is the fault that ye do not know who I am!

Reader, if thou dost not know Christ, it is not that His words are obscure,—*that* is not the cause! “True are His words, His works are clear;”—the fault is *thine* if thy soul is hovering undecided between yes and no. The good Shepherd’s voice is clear and unmistakable, but it is only *His sheep* that hear Him. He who feels no hunger for His pasture, because, like these Jews, he is satisfied with his own,—he scorns to be the sheep of this Shepherd. “*Ye are not My sheep, as I said unto you.*” By describing His sheep, He had at the same time told *them* that such they were *not*. He now repeats and strengthens what He has said of His sheep, to the comfort of those poor sheep who were present (there were certainly some such even in Solomon’s porch), for the wolf in Pharisees’ clothing had set himself to assault them and to tear them away from the Shepherd.

Ver. 27, 28. “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*”

Three properties of His sheep, to which the Shepherd has three offices to correspond: to those *who hear His voice* He gives eternal life; those *whom He knows* He never suffers to perish; those *who follow Him* no man can pluck out of His hand. This is comforting to the sheep, but it is also matter of rejoicing to the Shepherd. Never will there be wanting to the calling Shepherd hearkening sheep whom He saves through His life, after having redeemed them through His death; and no man shall pluck those sheep out of His hand, who, known by Him, follow Him and trust in His voice. This it was that comforted our fathers when they confessed that the one holy Christian Church must always abide, “namely: holy believers and the sheep who hear their Shepherd’s voice” (Schmalk. Art). He who in Christ’s word hears the Shepherd’s voice, hears it aright, with the ear of a true sheep, and he will be for ever hid in the mighty hand of his Shepherd’s grace. The sheep to

whom, in following Him, Christ gives *eternal life* shall never *perish*, nor be *plucked* from His hand; neither the corruption and weakness of our flesh, nor the cruel enmity of the Devil and of the world, shall ever separate us from eternal life in communion with Jesus Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. The hand of the Shepherd will hold us with a power which nothing can overcome, if we only *give ourselves up* to be held by His hand in the sincere clinging of our heart to Him. St. Paul is resting in the mighty hand of Jesus, from which no man can pluck him, when he utters the triumphant song of faith: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" and when he boldly maintains his certainty of eternal Life in opposition to all the powers of earth and hell (Rom. viii. 35, &c). To the Jews, indeed, the poor hand of Jesus had no might, and when they soon after saw it nailed to the cross, whilst the sheep whom He had fed were scattered abroad, they dared to sneer: "How finely Thou holdest Thy sheep in Thy mighty hand!" But His glory, though hidden from the eyes of the Jews, is yet real glory as of the Good Shepherd, and His hand is really able to protect His sheep against all the powers of the enemy, *because it is one with the hand of the Almighty Father*. This immoveable foundation of our hope is disclosed to us in the following words.

Ver. 29, 30. "*My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.*"

The Father has *given* the sheep to the Son in order that the Son might give them eternal life; and no man can bring to nought this council of eternal love, for it is the council of Him who *is greater than all*, against whose almighty power all those enemies of life are powerless who strive to pluck out of the Saviour's hand those that have been given Him, and that He has saved through His life. Yes, he who should be able to pluck them out of *the Son's hand* should be able, which is impossible, to pluck them out of the almighty hand of the Father, for, being in the Lord's hand, they must be likewise in the

Father's hand : "*I and my Father are one.*" In blessed consciousness of this oneness with the Father, the Son in His sacerdotal prayer says : *All mine are thine and thine are mine.*" The Father did not give *away* the sheep out of His own hand when He gave them into the hand of the Son as their shepherd. The hand of the Father and the Son is one and the same God's hand. The absolute power belonging to God the Son possesses equally with the Father, and this equality of power rests upon their oneness of nature. Not *one Person*, but *One*—*i.e.*, two Persons of one essence are the Father and the Son.

Through faith, then, we are kept unto salvation, not by human power, but by the power of God (1 Peter i. 5). He who holds His candlesticks together with their stars in His right hand is the Lord, the almighty Son of the almighty Father, and out of His mouth goes a sharp two-edged sword, which is His word, living and powerful ; if He is for us, if His word fights on our side, then who is there against us that can *pluck* us from His protecting hand ? A glance at the sword of His mouth, a laying hold in faith of His word, and we are safe. But woe to us if we should have the sharp two-edged sword against us ! If God with His word is against us, who can be for us to *deliver* us out of His avenging hand !

The Jews understand Christ according to the plain meaning of the words, and in this respect are less blind than many so-called Christians who, because they are not warm enough to adore Jesus as the Son of God, and not cold enough to stone Him as a blasphemer, desire some lukewarm interpretation of the words, "*I and my Father are one.*"

Ver. 31. "*Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.*"

Compare chap. viii. 59. He who is equal in power with the Father will oppose them with no other power but that of His word. He speaks as "God's own child of peace."

Ver. 32. "*Jesus answered them*" (that is, answered their gestures menacing to stone Him): "*Many good works have I*

showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?"

This He says that they might even now believe and be saved (chap. v. 34). It is as if He had said: Do I *say* merely that I am one with my Father? Do I not also *work* from my Father? Have I not given you to see *works*, many works, which *the Father* has given me, and which He Himself has wrought, seeing that He dwells in me? And are the works which I have shown unto you other than good, than worthy of the Father? Which of all my works do you think deserves that I should be stoned?

Oh, great love, love beyond measure! He, the almighty Lord, had power, if He thought fit, to slay the wicked with the breath of His lips (Isa. xl. 4); but He rather heaps the fiery coals of His Christ-like works upon their heads, if perhaps their hands might let the stones fall, and their knees bend in the dust before Him! But if they *will* kill Him,—well, He has power to lay down His life, but nevertheless, they shall know that they hate Him without a cause, and that they reward Him evil for good and hatred for His love (Ps lxix. 5; cix. 5).

"For which of those works do ye stone me?" Oh, that this sorrowful question of the Saviour may strike to the very heart them who stone Him afresh by sullen resistance to all the drawings of His grace, by haughty rebellion against the sovereignty of His love, by coarse unthankfulness to all His goodness! "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me!" Truly, if this most gentle chiding from thy God and Saviour cannot soften thy heart, it must be of more than human hardness, steeled in the forge of the devil, like as was the heart of these Jews (chap. viii. 38). And yet, see! even this hard, devilish, Pharisee-heart was for a moment softened by a slight sense of the "many good works" which bore witness for the Son of God whom they would have stoned. They did *not* stone; but they would fain persuade themselves that they should be justified in

stoning Him, although in His works they might find nothing to censure (Lev. xxiv. 16).

Ver. 33. "*The Jews answered Him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy: and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.*"

For the glorification of their Judaism the Jews would have liked a Christ who should bring signs and wonders and many good works; but such a Christ as this,—one who was come down to them from above as to those who were from beneath (chap. viii. 23), and who represented faith in Himself as the only bridge from beneath to above, from death into life,—*Him* in their pride they could not endure. *A man* thou art—say they—even as we, and yet makest thyself *God*! Thy blasphemy is evident! The Saviour answers them in a manner which disarms their pretended zeal for God's honour, and which should have helped to explain to any honest inquirer among them the meaning of His word: "*I and my Father are one.*"

Ver. 34-36. "*Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If He called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken: say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest: because I said, I am the Son of God?*"

The pharisaical severing of *God* and *man*, as if they never could come together, was in a general point of view contrary to Scripture. Between God, the almighty Creator of heaven and earth, and man created *in His image*, a wall of separation has indeed been established through sin; but nevertheless, even from the beginning, God's love has cherished the thought of again coming near to man and of graciously restoring in man the image of God which had been lost. This feature of the inclining of the Divine love to fallen man is deeply imprinted upon the whole of the Old Testament; the God of the Old Testament is not a God that is *afar off* (Jer. xxiii. 23), and it

is the property of the heathen gods and not of the God of Israel to be envious and grudging (Deut. iv. 7). Even if the Jews had been right in calling Jesus *a man* like themselves, they would yet have been wrong in charging Him with blasphemy because He said that He was *the Son of God*. This is the line of thought that the Lord takes in His answer, in which, we may observe, He meekly stoops to the minds of the Jews from whom His eternal, essential Godhead was hidden. From *their* law He convicts them of mistaken zeal by quoting from the Psalms (lxxxii. 6) a passage, in which the *law* of Moses is explicitly referred to (Exod. xxi. 6, in which the Hebrew for *the judges* of our English version is *the gods*): “*I have said, Ye are gods.*” In this passage of the Psalms, the *judges* in Israel were addressed. The judge’s office is *God’s* (Deut. i. 17), and God honours the human bearer of His *office* with His *name*, as in the fifth commandment He attaches to those who bear the name of *father* the “honour” which properly is due to Him alone. Compare also Exod. iv. 16; vii. 1. It is God’s will that He Himself should be recognised in the magisterial and judicial office. Yes, as we learn from Ps. lxxxii., even the human unrighteousness of judges cannot obliterate the name, testifying to God’s righteousness, which they bear: on account of their judicial sins, “the gods” shall *die like men*, but the judicial office preserves its dignity, and its bearers their name: “*ye are gods.*” If judges are unrighteous, their Divine title of honour calls aloud to their consciences of the crime of which they are guilty, in that they bear God’s name unto no purpose; yet God the righteous judge does not repent of having called them gods. Now, if Scripture—which must be right in every word, as well in this passage as in those which command that blasphemers of the *one* God shall be stoned, for it *cannot* be broken, cannot be *loosed asunder*, because it is one sacred whole, joined together in one, by God Himself—if Holy Scripture calls them gods who, through the word of God, are put into an office which belongs to God without respect to the worthiness or unworthiness of the per-

sons, merely because the Divine word has appointed them : how should it agree with Scripture that *He whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world* should be charged with blasphemy because He had called Himself *the Son of God* ? Observe well how the Lord here compares Himself with, and yet at the same time separates Himself from those who in the Psalm are called gods. Those profaned the name of God, which, as holding a Divine office, they bore ; Him on the contrary, God, as *the Father*—not through a word spoken to Him in time, but through His eternal love, declaring its holy nature *in* Him—has sanctified from His birth (Heb. vii. 26), separating Him from sinners, and sealing Him with the seal of His fatherly complacency (chap. vi. 27), and has *sent* Him into the world as His Christ, whose holy *person*, on the one hand, reflects the holiness of the *office* to which, on the other, He is appointed. In Him only it is that every holy office divinely appointed in the old economy, as well as the judicial office, has found its truth and fulfilment. Sinful men, who were called gods by virtue of the Divine business to which by the word of God they were called,—they, in their unholiness, were only able to shew forth the glory of the holy God in a shadowy and partial manner ; not until the Word *Himself* became flesh and dwelt full of grace and truth amongst His people,—only in the holy Son of Man who is the only begotten of the Father, did the honour reserved for human nature appear in its fulness.

“Where God and man in One unite,
And perfect fulness shines,”

there the original of that God-man glory, of which the judges and kings, the priests and prophets in Israel, were but types, foreshadowing and longing for it, is beheld at length in the radiance of its perfect splendour.

The Lord might easily have referred them to other passages of Scripture, which plainly and expressly set forth the God-head of the Messiah (as He did in Matt. xxii. 44). Instead of the eighty-second, He might have quoted the second Psalm,

which says, "Thou art *my Son*, to-day have I begotten thee." But His loving purpose is to raise a salutary feeling of shame in the breasts of His gainsayers ; therefore, for the present, He leaves all such oracles announcing His own majesty, and humbly ranks Himself amongst such of the children of men as are appointed by the word of God to be "gods and sons of the Most High." No more shall His *words* be heard by the Jews ; His *works* only shall now preach to them, pointing out to them *that one* Son of God who alone amongst all the sons of God shares not only in God's name, but also in God's being and essence. In Him there had appeared a Helper for the "afflicted and needy" (Ps. lxxxii. 3) in the highest and most blessed sense : why, then, did they not know Him who really and personally *is* what it was *their* office, as rulers of the Jews, to *shadow forth* ? Why did they persecute Him who was sent to "deliver the poor and needy, and to rid them out of the hand of the wicked," and construe as blasphemy the name which was sealed by His works, whilst they themselves, according to the Scripture quoted by our Lord, bore this name, but by their wicked works profaned it ? Such questions as these the Lord seeks to bring home to the consciences of His persecutors, whilst He adds :

Ver. 37, 38. "*If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works : that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him.*"

Thus speaks the Holy One of God ! As when He challenged them to convict Him, if they could, of a sin, and then, when they were all speechless, attacked their conscience, and said, "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me ?" so here He is willing to submit to their rejection of Him, if to His words, "*I and my Father are one*," they could venture to oppose the contradiction, "Thou doest not *the works* of thy Father." But none dared do that. None could name a single work done by Him which they could say the Father might not acknowledge as *His*

own ; while, on the contrary, many works of His they had seen with their own eyes which could be none other than the works of God the Father in Him. “He hath done all things well.”

“Well, then,” continues the Lord, when all remained dumb, “if I *do* the works of my Father, even if ye will not believe *me*, believe *the works*.” Although your eyes may be too dim to see in me, in my *Person*, the brightness of the Father’s glory, and though your hearts may be too insensible to trace in my *words* the spirit and life of the Father, yet at any rate, honour the works which the Father dwelling in me does, so far as to let them reckon as the works of *God*. Then will they become to you, as they did to your Nicodemus, a ladder of *knowledge*, by which you will mount up to the *belief* “*that the Father is in me and I in Him,*” and will no longer take offence when I say, “*I and my Father are one.*”

One—one God, whose original life is the common life both of the Father and of the Son (chap. v. 26). “I am nothing different from what the Father is, so however as that I remain Son ; and the Father is nothing different from what I am, so however as that He remains Father. He that knows me has known the Father and learnt the Son.” (Chrysostom.)

Ver. 39. “*Therefore they sought again to take Him : but He escaped out of their hands.*”

They were not His sheep. The Son of the Almighty Father—Him out of whose hand no man shall pluck His own—they now sought again to *seize*, that they might take Him out of Solomon’s porch and stone Him (chap. viii. 59). But this time again He *escaped* out of their hands, for His hour was not yet come ; and what He said was true, “No man taketh my life from me.” This word the Jews now see manifested in power when Jesus, seemingly so weak and unprotected, yet escapes out of their violent hands.

Ver. 40-42. “*And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptised : and there He abode. And*

many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle : but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there."

As if for refreshment, after having suffered so much from the unbelieving, the Saviour retreated to a place where he expected to find sheep who would hear His voice. And this shepherd's joy fell richly to His share. In the neighbourhood of the Jordan, there where John the Baptist had begun His work as forerunner, and had proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," in the place where the two first sheep had found their way to their Shepherd (chap. i. 29, 35), the appearance of the Lord awoke in the minds of men the perhaps now slumbering recollection of His messenger, and the joy of the bridegroom's friend, whose mouth had been long closed, was again fulfilled. The seed of the Divine word has an incomprehensible power of germinating ; in the case of many the Baptist's words seemed in vain, who yet, in consequence of his preaching, now came to Jesus.

There is something very beautiful in the confession with which they come. It is a matter of small importance to them that John did no miracle. He who was to come and who now is come is miracle enough to them. Oh, how the faith of these people of Perea condemns the unbelief of Jerusalem ! "*All things which John spake of this man were true :*" it was true what he said, although then it was hidden from us, and grieved are we that we have been so late in knowing the truth. "Truth is true even before it is known as truth" (Bengel).

Herein John is a type of every servant of Christ. The gift of working miracles which has been imparted but to few, we can do without, if only our hearers bear this one testimony to us : "All things that they spake of Jesus Christ are true ;" if only our preaching (although it may have lasted longer than three years) is at length sealed as the true witness of Christ through the experience of those who believe and are saved, then we shall have done miracles enough.

“*Many believed on Him there.*” From Jerusalem He was driven away—in Perea He was received with joy. So it is now. If the Gospel is not suffered in one place, it will go to another to abide there, and many there are who believe in it. The good Shepherd cannot be without sheep, even if He must seek them in the wilderness.

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